

## MY REFORM.

BY ESTHER SERLE KENNETH.

### CHAPTER I.

I ran up the steps, rang, and a servant admitted me into the house. I gave him my card for Mrs. Charles, and sat down in the parlor.

It was the back parlor,—a long room, furnished with Brussels and hair-cloth, well furnished, but stiff in arrangement, and dreary in atmosphere, being warmed by a furnace, dry and hot.

I walked the floor once or twice, glanced at the plaster casts on the brackets,—miserable imitations of things divine; I observed a guitar, and wondered who played upon it; I stood gazing from the back windows into the yards below, for a moment. All the time I was possessed by a nervous excitement which would not let me sit down quietly. Observing a pier glass in the front parlor, I went in to make a final inspection of my toilet. The room was not very light. As I stood regarding my personal appearance with, perhaps, a criticizing carelessness of satisfaction, I suddenly became aware of some one looking at me,—not at my broadcloth, my hair or my beard,—but at me. I was too old a soldier in social tactics to be discomposed,—embarrassing as was my position,—but went on stroking my whiskers, and taking as criticizing side views of my *tout ensemble*, as though in the sacred privacy of my dressing-room. Meanwhile I wondered who was looking at me. I had known intuitively that it was not Mrs. Charles. It was a lady. It was a young lady. \*It was a person of individuality and power. So much I knew, instinctively, as I stood there.

Suddenly I dropped my gaze upon the reading-rack where there was an open book, and then, careful of my mastery in this strange encounter, I let my eyes follow a straight line to those other eyes,—dark, wide, steadfast, and below my level, as the owner sat upon a hassock, her head dropped back among the deep red draperies of the window.

When she had my gaze, she held it.

I struggled for the bow and murmured greeting.

She spoke,—

"Mr. Church?" and arose.

"That is my name," mechanically,—absorbed in her still face.

"You called to see Mrs. Charles?" going on with a low, flexible monotony. "She is not in; and left word with me, before she went out, that you would please excuse her, and call tonight."

I bowed, my eyes falling; feeling she knew that I had no business there, but wondering how she had known it. It was for Mrs. Charles's interest, as well as for mine, to keep our business to herself.

"Thank you,—good-afternoon," I said, dimly conscious of my own exit, as I went out.

In the street I walked on, mechanically, for a long way, not realizing what I was doing; absolutely knowing nothing but the sense of encounter which filled me. What I had been, what I had done in the last half-hour, I realized dimly; but how sharply, how keenly, I still saw and felt the eyes of that girl!

Who was she? I could remember nothing of her dress or her employment when I entered the room. Just as she looked at me,—into my heart and soul,—so I remembered only her identity apart from all surroundings. I was uncomfortable; I had been touched. That girl's eyes had looked me through, and her intelligence sunk a shaft into a portion of my being which I had guarded so jealously that I ignored it to myself, not wishing to hear my own knowledge of it.

She knew me. I found myself walking on impatiently, chafed, startled, pained to a revolt.

Who was she? I remembered her height; it gave me a sense of large proportions in my own corporal body; she must have been small and slight. Then I had a recollection of a gleam of red. That might have been the curtain,—or was it her dress? I must know who she was. I must ask Mrs. Charles. Ask her what? How should I

describe her? Ah! I could specify her messenger. That evening I should see Mrs. Charles, but meanwhile I had best get out of my uncomfortable mood.

## CHAPTER II.

I went into Pieffs to dine. Two of my friends were there. We dined together, — I, drinking largely, — wretched, — dogged by the demons of my life. I had hoped them dead, — almost dared believe it, they had laid in such still coils about my heart so long. That they were there I never doubted, for I felt ever their coldness. But I had prayed they might not stir and sting me again.

I had drank considerable champagne before I went into Phelans for a game of billiards. It was that, perhaps, which made me think from every shadow of those brilliant rooms those dark eyes searched me out. I did not go to see Mrs. Charles; I was not fit. I took a friend with me to my rooms when I went home, because I did not want to be left alone.

Discriminatingly bathed and soda-watered, I made my toilet, in the morning, with a view of calling upon Mrs. Charles.

I wondered who I might see — half-dreadingly, half-hopingly — as I walked along. In the clear, bracing, winter air, I was half inclined to believe the last night's episode a feverish dream.

I ran up the steps of the house, rang the bell, and was admitted to the parlors again. *This time, I seated myself and looked the rooms through searchingly.* They were unoccupied, save by myself. But there was the hassock, and there was the reading-rack as they had been yesterday.

Suddenly there came a light, swift foot on the stairs. Mrs. Charles came fluttering in, pale and agitated.

"My husband! my husband! he is here! He must not see you! Don't stay a moment! Tomorrow I will write you a note!" she whispered.

I walked toward the door.

"Does he suspect?" I asked.

"He will, if he sees you. And he is so horribly jealous!"

I stooped down and picked something from the floor.

"What is that?"

"Nothing but a button. Send me word tomorrow."

"If I can; if he has gone."

I opened the hall door; she closed it. I passed down the steps, looking at my prize, a little gold button, found near the reading-rack. Was it hers? Upon it was finely engraved the name "*Vivia Mars.*"

That name suited that face; it was vivid and strong. And I wanted to see it again, — wished for a sight of it with a strange, fascinated feeling, a feeling which absorbed and stupefied me as I walked along, thinking of it.

To the race-course that afternoon; to the opera that night. To Phelans the next morning; to a dinner-party of my club in the afternoon; to a ball in the evening. The next day I had some reporting to do; the day after a literary article for one of the leading magazines was demanded of me. Then I was at a political matinee, with a champagne supper. After that I remember nothing distinctly for three weeks.

There seemed a period of struggling with enemies, of being reproached by dead friends, of suffering strange bodily and mental torments, when I came to a slow consciousness of lying upon a sick-bed in a darkened chamber. I tried to raise my hand to my head, but was too weak. I had been ill a long time, then.

I lay still, thinking, — remembering the men of my companionship, and wondering who took care of me; and trying to get some clew to the time I had lain there.

I could not satisfy myself, and certain mute objects in the room seemed to taunt me with their superior intelligence. A Venus upon a bracket in the corner dropped her gaze knowingly to the carpet, and a little negro urchin in plaster kicked up his heels in an ecstasy of fun at my bewilderment; while there seemed a dreary waiting in the stillness of the room. Soon I fell weakly asleep again.

## CHAPTER III.

I must have slept all night, for the sun was shining against the east windows when I awoke again. There were low voices in the room. I spoke, — my voice like the whisper of a reed.

"Who is there?"

A familiar face came to the bedside, — Fred Graham's.

"How are you, Archie?" he said earnestly.

"Have I been very sick?" I asked.

He shook his head.

"A tough siege, I tell you! We hardly thought we should bring you around."

"Ah?"

I lay still a moment, occupied with the stupendous idea of ending my days at that time.

"Who has taken care of me?"

"My sister and I. But Old Squills will be afool of me if I let you talk. Lie still and go to sleep now, like a good fellow."

Here I observed the negro urchin on the bracket grinning at me again.

"Where is your sister?" I demanded, resisting having the bedclothes tucked under my chin.

"Down-stairs. You must keep still, Church!"

"Well; take that confounded grinning monkey off that corner bracket."

From over the footpost I saw the inky image descend, the sooty heels kicking triumphantly in the air until the last. Then, with a feeling of relief, I fell into a dreamy doze, in which I half realized what was going on in the room, while I wondered at the inconsistent visions of my own weak brain.

I don't quite know whom I expected to see when I opened my eyes with a sudden desire of discovering Fred Graham's sister; but I was disappointed when my glance fell upon a tall, angular woman, with light hair, seated in a rocking-chair at the foot of the bed, composedly knitting. She looked like Fred, being tall, slender, and fair, but she was altogether of another class of beings from that gay, loose, erratic fellow. She was very strictly moral and unselfish, — a natural Sister of Charity, I had no doubt; but I sighed heavily as I looked drearily about the room, and wondered how long I should have to stay in that situation, under her care. She arose and came to the bedside.

"As soon as you are strong enough, I am going to have you removed to my house," she said. "You will get strong faster there."

She had really a sweet smile. My torpid heart began to warm toward her.

"You are very kind," I said. "I was just thinking how dreary it would be, lying here and getting well."

"Yes; but you must n't talk. Let me do that," she said. "No, it won't do for

you to stay here; you will get morbid and restless, and try your strength too soon. You will come and spend a month with me. I try to make my house pleasant, and it will be better for you to be there."

She would not let me talk, so I could only smile faintly in reply, and bend my head. She went on with low, pleasant talk, and I lay and watched her face, so homely, yet with such sweetness coming out in every line and wrinkle, and such strong goodness and sense in the direct gaze of her gray eyes!

But before I was strong enough to be moved, I had abundance of time in which to find all the imperfections in the wall and ceiling of the room, to count all the gilt spots on the paper, to get by heart the fresco pattern of the cornices. Also to discover at exactly what hour the morning sun fell aslant the head of Venus; and to wonder how many of my cronies had awakened with a headache; and to meditate upon the political success of those friends of mine who had kept open house for their set for two months past, one of whom was my host when I fell insensible from his dining chair. More I thought of, and fell from thought into long, refreshing naps, always lulled to rest by the monotonous click of Miss Margaret Graham's knitting-needles.

At the end of ten days I was strong enough to be put into a carriage and driven to her house. A large, commodious, wooden house on the Bloomingdale road, every room furnished for comfort and convenience, though the walls lacked Titians and Correggios, and the brackets held only a pot of geranium or a bulb-glass of hyacinth. I was put upon a leather-covered lounge before the library fire, and left to myself for an hour before dinner.

Something came over me as I lay there, — something sorrowful and sweet, — suggested, perhaps, by the song of the canary in the window; for once when I had been ill in my childhood, I had been nursed on a lounge before just such an open fire, with a happy canary singing in the window. It made me feel as if I had back that innocent childhood. I leaned back in my chair and looked into the glowing coals with a happy content.

"Mr. Church?"

It was a low voice which uttered the name close behind me, a voice so melodious that it need not have startled a woodland

bird. Yet it startled me,—thrilled me,—made the blood leap from my heart to my face. I turned my head and looked again into those eyes.

But they were tenderer at that moment; they did not hurt me as before. She smiled.

"Will you dine cozily in private here, or will you join us at the common table? Allow me to prescribe for your weariness, and suggest that you dine here."

"It would be very pleasant if you would make a *tete-a-tete* for me. Quite alone, I should be lonely," I said, smiling.

She shook her head.

"You must n't coax me into anything so pleasant; I am needed down-stairs. Making toast and tea, and serving it extemporaneously, is one of my fortes. I will show you, some time. Now a servant may bring you a very tiny mutton chop, a roll and butter, farina and cream. That is all. Your dinner is already ordered. It seems that you eat under orders for a while."

"Yes; and I do not object. I can eat anything, if they will only let me have enough of it."

"So hungry?" with a little grimace.

"Yes."

"I know; I had a fever once." Suddenly bending her head,—"If I can, I will smuggle you a Charlotte russe," said so confidentially, so animatedly, that a low, gleeful laugh broke from me. But she was gone when I would have thanked her with all the fervor of a half-starved, convalescing fever-patient.

Who was she? I asked myself again. Her atmosphere seemed sweet and healthy as before I had felt it pungent and racking. I waited impatiently for her coming. Pretty soon the door opened again, but this time it was only the servant with my dinner.

He put the tray on the table beside me, arranged the dishes, and asked me if I wished his attendance. I told him no; he went out and left me alone. I eagerly searched the pockets of my vest. Was it the one I had worn the day I called upon Mrs. Charles? It was, indeed; and there was my trophy,—the little, enchased button of gold. I read the name again. Yes, it was very like her.

Suddenly the door opened quickly, and Miss Margaret Graham came in. She was dressed for dinner.

"Are you comfortable, Mr. Church?"

she said. "I sent Vivian up to speak to you; I have been very busy. Do you wish for anything?"

"Nothing, thank you. Miss Vivian?"

"Miss Mars,—a young friend of mine. She is on a visit here. A kind, good girl; perhaps she may be company for you. She plays chess and backgammon, reads very nicely, and chats pleasantly. You will like her, I think. Are you quite sure that you need nothing?"

"Nothing at all," I said fervently, with a sense of satisfaction which she little suspected.

"Well, make yourself contented. We shall be up here in an hour, to spend the evening."

She left me to my dinner and my thoughts.

#### CHAPTER IV.

They came up in an hour,—Miss Margaret and Fred, Miss Mars, a gentleman and lady, and a little child. The gentleman and lady were Mr. and Mrs. Lovering; the child an orphan adopted by Miss Graham.

The little girl came shyly up to me and offered me some sweetmeats; I took her on my knee. Miss Mars, passing by, rested on my chair a moment, and whispered,—

"They had nothing I could bring you. Tomorrow you shall dine down-stairs, and shall not be restricted."

Her smile was so arch, her eyes rained down such a soft light, that I felt her to be beautiful. Yet, when she seated herself on a footstool, and sat looking gravely into the fire, I saw that she was not handsome,—indeed, that she was quite plain. The features were strong and inharmonious, the head oddly developed, and covered with masses of fair hair,—very luxuriant and wavy,—the heavy rings falling to the shoulders and clustering about the forehead. Her eyes had different colors, I found afterward. Sometimes they were gray, sometimes black, and sometimes hazel; and I have looked into them, when they seemed colorless as water. The mouth was large, not pretty in repose, but mobile to a fascinating extent. One was always watching for the look they liked to see, an expression that came rarely, but which charmed one irresistibly.

Her manner toward me was a study. I had been called a fascinating man; and she seemed so utterly unconscious of it, that, in

all sincerity, I was very doubtful of myself. As a man of true dignity, I was simply an utter failure. I fell to studying why she noticed me at all, for I felt at fault before her when I thought of myself at all. At first, this was not often, because she had a way of interesting me beyond myself,—of drawing me out without affecting my consciousness. In return she showed me her own heart and soul, so frankly, with such freedom from deception, or coloring of herself, that I felt my suddenly awakened consciousness with desperate pain. I watched her askant, as she read and worked near me, and felt how impossible it was for her to know me, as I knew her, without her starting from me in utter disgust and contempt. Her goodness was not negative, nor her purity the result of circumstances. She was utterly human in constitution, but her understanding brought her light and guidance; she relied upon herself as upon a rock. Once or twice I felt her eyes sifting me with that look I had seen in them first, but usually they were sweet, kind, sympathetic eyes which drew me, heart and soul, toward her.

I grew strong rapidly—more rapidly than I desired—my time of convalescence was so pleasant. I was able to go out for some days before the cold spring weather became sufficiently moderate to allow of the venture.

One morning I stood at the breakfast-room window, looking wistfully out into the falling rain, when Miss Mars came behind me.

"Are you disappointed by the rain?" she asked.

"Yes. I had hoped to go out today," I answered, turning to look at her as I liked to see her in a wrapper of black and crimson, a black ribbon knotting back her fair, clustering hair. She did not speak for some minutes, standing beside me and gazing absently into the street,—something grave and earnest in her face. I could not keep my eyes from her, but she did not mind my gazing.

The profile of her face had a peculiarity of expression which reminded me of a popular prima donna. Then thoughts of "Norma" and "La Traviata" suggested the question,—

"Do you like the opera?"

"I know nothing about it. I never witnessed an opera in my life."

I looked my astonishment.

"I will tell you why," she said. "I am peculiarly susceptible to such luxurious things, and avoid the temptation to become subject to their influence. I have never heard an opera, and I think that I never shall."

"Do you think it would harm you?"

"I believe that I should become inexpressibly fascinated, and be tempted to neglect other things on that account. Such a fascination would become injurious to a healthy state of living; and for so false a pleasure I should eventually sacrifice my self-respect," and she looked up at me with a smile.

I looked away from her frank eyes, and stood silent.

"It is a pity that it rains," she said, recurring to our first subject.

"Yes, I want to get out-of-doors," I said, with serious restiveness.

Her glance sought mine quickly,—then fell more quickly.

"I suppose so," she said gravely; then turned and walked across the floor, once or twice. I still stood by the window.

"I think it will be good weather tomorrow. I shall surely go out then," I observed.

She came back to the window, and stood, not looking at me, but with her face half hidden by her hand, as her elbow rested on the sash.

"Will you pardon me for what I am going to say?" she asked.

"You could say nothing that I would not pardon," I answered, surprised.

"Before you were ill, Mr. Church"—She stopped.

"What is it?" I said earnestly, and feeling myself growing a little pale.

"If there was anything before that time," she went on, and speaking as if with an effort, "that you desired to be rid of, yet had not the resolution to commence the struggle with,—it will be possible now to make the wish a resolution; because now all your old habits are broken off, and, to be resumed, must be deliberately taken up. Have you thought of this?"

"I have not."

"I wish you would think of it."

She was gone in an instant, leaving me astonished.

## CHAPTER V.

Suddenly Fred came in,—late to breakfast.

"Hillo, Archie! moping?"

"No," I answered, with an effort to be at ease. "Admiring the prospect for today."

"You find fault with a rainy day!" he exclaimed. "You, with nothing to do but to be nursed and read to and cosseted by Vivia Mars! You are a confounded fool, Archie Church."

"Thank you."

"Oh, quite gratuitous,—that sort of thing,—on my part," he went on between the mouthfuls of beefsteak and muffin. "But if you knew anything, you'd know that you was a discontented noodle, Church."

I went slowly up to my room. There, alone, I had my thoughts. The morning wore away as I walked the floor.

By and by there came a knock at my door.

"Who is there?" I demanded, testy at being disturbed.

"Miss Graham says will you come down, sir?"

It was a servant's voice. I looked at my watch,—one o'clock.

"Is it dinner-time, Mary?" I asked, opening the door.

"Yes, sir."

"Tell Miss Graham I wish to be excused. I do not care for any dinner."

I was left alone again. I flung myself upon my bed, and lay with my face buried in my hands. By and by I heard a carriage stop before the house, and voices in the hall as the front door was opened and people passed up and down the steps. More company, I thought; or perhaps, the Lovings were going away; their visit was nearly out. Ought not I to go down and make my adieux? No, I was pale and wretched-looking, and my appearance would excite remark. They would believe me indisposed, and excuse me. I lay still.

The afternoon wore away. By and by there came another knock at my door. I rose and opened it. There stood Miss Margaret.

"Mr. Church, are you ill?" she asked.

"No—yes—a little. My head aches," I said composedly.

"Ah! you have taken cold. Come down—

stairs and have a dish of tea, and let me bathe your head in cologne."

"Thank you. I will come down," I said.

I arranged my toilet hastily, and followed her down-stairs into the parlor,—hoping Vivia was there. But the room was unoccupied.

"Sit here in this easy-chair," said Miss Margaret kindly. "I was afraid you were sick when you would not come down to see Vivia off, at noon, but"—

"What!" I exclaimed, sitting bolt upright under her soothing hands, "Vivia gone away?"

"Yes. Did n't you know? I sent Mary up to tell you."

"I thought she came to call me to dinner!"

"She contrived to make some blunder,—stupid girl! I might have known it when you sent down word that you did not wish to dine, and no word to Vivia. I thought she looked hurt."

"Where is she?" I exclaimed, starting up.

"At her boarding-house, East Fourth Street. Poor child, she works very hard at teaching music. And to think that she has no home!"

"What is the number?" I asked.

She gave it to me. In an instant I had determined to call upon Vivia. It was the house at which Mrs. Charles resided,—Mrs. Charles, a woman impure, handsome, treacherous, and false; a woman whose name was handled lightly in private by a certain set of men. I had known her well, to my shame.

And she was under the same roof with Vivia Mars! My breath came hurriedly at the thought. It betokened fear of danger, shame, and pain. I cursed the duplicity of the woman whose cunning and caution kept her in society and among those who were good and pure. And then what loathing of myself came over me!

But out of great pain I had worked some degree of absolution. I felt an intense hunger for truth and purity, and I was full of desperate resolves. As yet I had formed no plans regarding Vivia Mars; I only desired not to come to utter shame before her,—to raise some claim, through all the disgrace of my life, upon her respect. Yet in regard to that shame and disgrace I would not have deceived her one iota if the known truth to her had been death to me. I could

ask no tolerance for my past. I could only pray that she kept a certain faith in me until I could prove a better future.

## CHAPTER VI.

When I met active life again, I faced it with brave resolves. I felt like a new man, with a fresh heart and soul; so tangible to me were my hopes that I half felt them realized. And with the conquest of my first temptation I gained new strength.

I shunned the men I had drank and gamed with. At the first invitation to drink, I refused flatly, and the news that I had deserted the ranks of the sporting-men of New York flew quickly through the set. I gave myself no time to heed jibe or chaffing. I vacated my rooms where I had lived so irregular a life, and took board in a pleasant, respectable family, where there was no tolerance of evil, but the pitying charity of kind hearts for the weakly unfortunate. I took up regular labor at reporting, and had work and a home, — two great bases of respectability.

Settled thus, I felt a certain comfort in myself and a confidence to see Vivia Mars. I passed by the house twice before I ventured to call. Then, as I went in, I met Fred Graham coming out.

I had asked for Miss Mars. The servant's message must have been waylaid, for after a moment Mrs. Charles came gliding into the room.

"Oh, I am so glad to see you!" she exclaimed, in a low, animated voice, as she glided into my arms. "Where have you been so long? I have been wretched about you."

"I have been ill," I answered, striving to disengage her hands from about my neck, gently enough not to anger her.

"Kiss me," she murmured, putting up her beautiful face.

Great credit as I take to myself for my conduct at that moment, I am not altogether sure but to the insecurity of my position (for I dreaded the appearance of Vivia) should it be credited. And then the late visit of Fred Graham had charged me with new intellectual vigor.

"I am afraid that some one will come in," I said with an anxiety which was not feigned. "Is that a real Turner?" I asked, going toward the mantel.

"You don't care for me," she began.

"Hark!" I said, "some one is coming." She laughed.

"No one is coming, nor can come until we hear their footsteps walking the length of the hall," she said. "Sit down here. I want to talk with you."

I sat down at a decent distance from her, and with my face to the door.

"I wish you would come here to board," she said, knotting the cords of her wrapper. "By the way, did you notice the young gentleman who went out as you came in? A tall fellow with a light mustache and curly hair?"

"I saw him," I answered.

"He's paying attention to a young lady here, — a Miss Mars. She confesses to be very much in love with him. We women get each other's confidences, you know. Come, I am in earnest about your coming here to board. Won't you?"

She left her seat, and before I could prevent her, had sunk upon her knees on a footstool beside me, and twined her arms about my neck. Her beautiful eyes shone coaxingly into mine, her soft curls fell against my cheek, — her fragrant breath began to steal away my self-possession. Involuntarily I yielded, clasped and kissed her.

As I raised my head I saw what she did not see, and tore her clinging arms from my neck as I sprang to my feet. A man stood in the open doorway, pale with rage. He came forward slowly; his eyes on mine, — a heavier, stronger man than I, but he had not the advantage of physical training. He sprang, — my clenched fist hit his chest like a battering-ram; he staggered, and I leapt past him into the hall, — the screams of the guilty wife and cries of interrogation from a dozen voices following me. I flung open the hall-door, and leaped into the street. Half a dozen strides, and I met Vivia Mars, — face to face. Her look of recognition changed to one of astonishment and affright as I dashed past her without a word.

## CHAPTER VII.

My first desire was to blow out my brains; my second, to go to the ends of the earth: and, hardly knowing what I was doing, I took a cab and dashed to one of the depots, sprang aboard the cars bound for the little country town where were located the few

distant relatives I had, and was set down at the station, within twenty yards of them.

I made a great sham of being glad to see them, joked with my pretty cousins, romped with the children, ate of the royal country supper, played games in the evening, and went to my room to bury my head in my pillow and break into hard, dry sobs of passionate grief. My heart was strained to a pitiful pain. Drowning, I had clung to the life-boat, and my hold had been beaten off,—I was left to die miserably in sight of succor. Was there *nothing* in me to make my life cared for by any one? Bad as I had been, was there not even a little child to pity me for my helplessness, when I had made so strong an effort, lifted up my eyes so wistfully to the truth? No. Then let me curse God, and die!

It was April weather. I staid where I was,—having no desire to be in one place more than another, caring nothing for life in any instance; but as I have said, it was April weather, and out of the joy of the blue sky, the clear gold of the sunset, the sunshine, and the swelling of the earth, I drew a strange comfort. Worn and wasted with the strain of my life, I felt a sense of rest. I lay down upon the warm ground, among the clover and daisies, and strength for another effort gathered in my heart and soul. Physical stamina vitalized me. I held up my head at last, restored,—loving life through pure joy of living in this beautiful world.

But I shunned the city; not that I was not sure of myself, for my loathing of its false pleasures was as keen as my sense of better ones, but because the associations pained me,—my heart being sore with regret for what might have been, and sad tears ready to come to my eyes. I felt my life to a great degree wrecked, yet the bulk lay out in God's sunshine, having a certain enjoyment of its own, through his kindness, and a certain use, to those reading aright the signs of transgression.

Then this state gave way to growing energies. Walt Whitman never eulogized too much a vigorous body. Terrible master as it is, never was a better servant. I put it to task. My soul was earnest,—my brain throbbled questioningly,—my heart was fed with my labors. My literary articles began to attract attention; I gained a position; fame grew; I was at last a man among men.

Two years had passed. News of Vivian Mars had never come in my way, and I did not choose to seek it. If the strength and honor I had gained had for me a sacred sweetness, thinking that she might learn of it, I never wished to seek her approval. I had gained a certain distrust of my own management of fate. God was wise, I knew. I struck hands with Bayard Taylor when he said,—

"Vex me not with weary questions,  
Seek no moral to deduce.  
With the present I am busy,  
With the future hold a truce:  
If I live the life he gives me,  
God will turn it to his use."

Yet I hardly dared trust myself to think of her as married. I felt that I needed her, cut of all the world. If she was the wife of another, I could only bow to God's will with an utter blindness. And then I knew that I was yet capable of great pain.

Summer again. The morning-glory vines pressed their great purple stars against my windows,—the birds swooped, twittering, through the avenues of the woods,—the bees buzzed among the clover,—the black-berry-vines trailed their white blooms along the stone walls under the blossomed locust-trees.

Often, in the beautiful mornings of those times, I used to walk to the station,—amusing myself with the excitement incident upon the arrival of the morning train. A great, yellow stage-coach usually trundled away to the village with all the passengers; but on one occasion two ladies were left. They passed down the green lane, in the direction of my home, and I followed at a distance, my heart beating, and I striving hard for self-possession to address them. By and by one of them turned, and saw me. I was very pale as I went up and took her hand,—the little, trembling hand of Vivian Mars.

"The mountain would not come to Mohammed, so what could Mohammed do but go to the mountain?" she said lightly, but every trace of color dying out of her face, and her lips trembling.

Miss Graham grasped my other hand.

"Yes: have you forgotten everybody that you ever knew, shutting yourself in among the valleys, and turning poet and philosopher?" she asked.

"I have not forgotten either of you," I



said. "I never dreamed of such a kindness as this, dear Miss Margaret."

"Well, you are to make much of us. We go back in the next train," she said. "To tell the truth, I came out half on Vivia's account, — to give her a breath of country air. You see how pale she is."

"I do, indeed."

We went to the house; had a luncheon of biscuits, milk, and honey, and then Miss Graham said, —

"Now let us see some strawberries growing."

So we went out into the strawberry fields. Miss Graham gathered strawberries with the zeal with which she did everything else, — wandering away, at last, and leaving me by Vivia.

We looked longingly into each other's eyes; she gave me her little pink-stained hands.

"Vivia, tell me truly why you came?" I said.

"I wanted you to know that I knew you," she said. "All this time" — she

stopped. "I am proud of you!" she said frankly.

"Is that all? When I love you so?"

"No," she said.

The birds swooped, twittering, under the trees, — the breezes brought us the scent of locust and blackberry blossoms, — the bees buzzed dreamily over the clover, and the strawberries glowed red among the grasses. Oh, how infinitely precious to me was my life!

By and by Miss Margaret came wandering back. I told her that Vivia was not going back in the next train, — that she was to stay at Locust Lodge for a week.

She smiled.

"Well, it will do you both good," she said.

Dear soul! she was with us when we were married, and when our boy was born, and, years after, when our little daughter died. We had life's bitter with its sweet, my wife and I; but we were at peace with God, and nought came amiss. "They that seek him shall find him."

## NANNY LEE.

BY AUNT MARY.

Bare-footed Nanny stood with her feet in a puddle of water, which the warm sun was lighting into sparkles as it pushed aside the rain-clouds, and looked smilingly down upon the child.

Were those rain-drops glistening on the child's brown cheek? No: they were tears. But Nanny was smiling as the sun now, and had forgotten that they were there.

Harry Blaine came up the road, whistling "Gentle Annie." Then Nanny danced out of the puddle, and away, never pausing till she stood in the doorway of her mother's cottage.

She heard Harry whistling as he came steadily on his way, and, drawing the door together, she looked slyly out at him.

When he came near the cottage, he stopped, and leaned against the gate, as if he were watching the ducks that were waddling toward the pond in the corner of the yard. But in reality he was watching for another glimpse of Nanny.

Quite unconscious of this, the little maiden closed the door, and stood laughing to herself when she had done so. She peeped through the curtain, and saw that he had not gone.

Harry Blaine was the son of a wealthy merchant who lived in the largest house in the village,—a house with gardens and a grove attached to it. Nanny had never been to it but once, and then it was to sell berries; and Harry was not at home. The girl who paid her for the berries had spoken coldly and crossly to her, and Nanny never cared to go there again.

But Harry attended the village school where Nanny always went, so that she knew him very well. And he was always kind to her, for she was bright, good-natured, and pretty. It did not trouble Harry if her dress was ragged: for, however whole Nanny's raiment when she started from home, it was sure to be torn when she returned at night; and her feet bare, for Nanny carried her shoes in her hand all summer.

That day at school one of Nanny's play-mates,—who never tore her dresses, and who knew that shoes were for feet and not

for hands, but who did not know her lesson half so well as Nanny,—had lost her place in her class to Nanny, and consequently relieved herself by calling Nanny "a beggar" at recess.

Nanny retorted; but several of the girls with whom she was not a favorite joined against her, and Nanny had recourse to passion and tears. Then Harry had taken her part, and shared the names that were showered upon her himself: only, as they could not call him a beggar, they called him a good-for-nothing dandy, and other names that they considered derogatory.

Nanny forgot herself in defending her champion; and when the school-bell had summoned them all to return to their studies, her tears were dried for the time; but after school they flowed again from some undeserved taunt, when Harry called out to her not to mind, that she was the dearest little lady in the school. So she had danced away through the breaking shower as happy as the sky.

Harry grew tired of embracing the gate, and was moving disconsolately away, when Nanny suddenly discovered that she must give the ducks their supper, and hastened out for that purpose.

"Why, Harry!"

"Yes: I've been following you all the way home. Did n't you see me?" asked Harry.

"You were behind me," said Nanny.

"Did n't you see me when you were wading in that puddle? Oh! I wish my mother 'd let me wade in puddles once in a while."

"It's beautiful fun," said Nanny; "but my mother doesn't let me do it when she knows." And as she spoke, forgetful of the ducks, Nanny mounted the fence, and sat composedly regarding Harry.

Just then a carriage, drawn by two handsome gray horses, drove up the road, upon which stately equipage Harry saw fit to turn his back.

"There's your mother and your sisters," said Nanny. "They're going to stop and take you in."

Which was true, to Harry's dismay.

The carriage stopped in front of the cottage, and Harry's mother called to him.

Reluctantly he said "Good-night" to Nanny, and obeyed the summons.

"What do you mean, Harry, by staying there with that little good-for-nothing?" asked his sister Lina, as she made room for him on the seat beside her.

"She is n't a little good-for-nothing," said Harry. "She's the prettiest and best girl in school. Is n't she pretty, Alice?" addressing his younger sister, who sat beside her mother on the front seat of the carriage.

"I don't know," said Alice doubtfully. "I don't think she dresses very well."

"Then you'd better give her a dress," said Harry. "She'd look a great deal prettier than you in pink muslin."

"The idea," said Lina, "of comparing Nanny Lee with Alice!"

Mrs. Blaine had regarded Nanny attentively as they drove slowly away, and there was something in her bright, pleasant face that greatly attracted her. She determined to learn more about her, and to discover if she were a fitting companion for her children.

Meanwhile, Nanny's mother had called to her from the house to come to her. She was sick in bed, and the baby had just wakened from his late nap, and was crying. Nanny good-naturedly took him in her arms and sought to amuse him; but suddenly the sunlight seemed to have faded from everything, although the clouds were still melting from the sky, and the sun was shedding the brilliant radiance of its setting.

Nobody to do anything but Nanny, and she a constant grief to her sick mother because of her carelessness! The frugal meal which she set upon the table for her father, on his return from his day's work, was arranged with Nanny's usual want of order. But Nanny was glad to see him, and began to gather heart again upon his arrival. Her mother's head ached less; the baby slept for the night; and when Nanny, too, crept to bed, she lay only a very little while wondering at the motion of the trees in the moonlight, as she saw them from her window, and then fell into a dreamless sleep.

The following day was Saturday, and a holiday. Nanny's mother was much better, and she helped her to get the house in order for the sabbath.

"And tomorrow," said Nanny's mother,

"I want you to promise me, Nanny, that you will keep your shoes on all day, and not tear your dress."

Nanny's face grew long, but she promised as her mother desired; and, to show how anxious she was to please, washed her face and hands, combed her hair, tied up her shoes,—just in time, for the carriage, with the gray horses, drew up in front of the house, and Nanny was sent to open the door to Mrs. Blaine.

"Can I see your mother, my dear?" she asked, after talking a short time with Nanny.

Nanny left the room, and sought her mother, who, hastily arranging her dress, repaired to the little parlor, which, Mrs. Blaine noticed with pleasure, though poorly furnished, was neat and pleasant.

Nanny wondered what they could be talking about; and the baby being asleep, and not needing her attention, she stole out to look at the horses, and to see if Harry were not somewhere about.

But he was no where in sight. His sister Alice sat in the carriage with the coachman, and smiled pleasantly at Nanny; and, noticing that she was dressed better than usual, and that she wore shoes, asked her to get her hat, and take a little drive.

Nanny eagerly complied, and was soon seated by Alice's side, driving up the road, which was long and shady and delightful.

Nanny was merry and artless, and Alice thought to herself that it was not strange that Harry liked her; and she hoped she would go to their house, as he desired, and wear her shoes.

In this hope she was not disappointed. On returning from her drive, Nanny found Mrs. Blaine taking leave of her mother, and her mother's pale face wreathed in smiles.

"How would you like to spend the day with Alice and Harry Blaine?" her mother asked. "Next Saturday their mother has invited you to go there. Alice has a new swing, which she wants you to try; and Harry has a puzzle that he thinks you can help him in discovering."

Nanny was delighted at the thought of going; and it never occurred to her that her best dress was torn, and would have to be mended. Her mother did not forget that such was the case, however, and sat up late one night to make it look as well as possible for Harry to wear. She was glad her little daughter was so happy and contented, and

tried not to sigh herself for something better for her to wear.

However, after that first delightful visit, Nanny never wanted pretty dresses. Mrs. Blaine was as charmed with her as Harry had been, and whenever she bought Alice a new dress, she bought one for Nanny too. Nanny's mother, also, was much benefited by this new acquaintance. With less care than she had known for many years, and happy in her little daughter's happiness, her health rapidly improved; and when the summer again came, an air of prosperity hovered over the little cottage and its inmates.

Nanny no longer paddled bare-foot in the puddles,—at least not when any one was near to see her,—but walked demurely in pretty button boots to church, or raced in heavy walking ones to school.

At the Blaines' she was a great pet, and even Lina acknowledged at last that she would lose in comparison with their own little Alice. Harry was in ecstasies when he beheld his school favorite no longer in the guise of a little beggar, but as prettily dressed as any of those who had rejoiced in giving her that appellation.

Nanny's father was at one time thrown

out of employment by the failure of his employer; but Mr. Blaine interested himself in obtaining business for him, and for the first time discovered how poorly he had been recompensed for his labor until then. He found him capable, also, of a position in his own firm, and as time went on the prospect of taking him as his partner brightened. As for Nanny, it seemed impossible for any prospect to brighten for her so long as her friendship with Harry and his family met with no alloy.

They sometimes climbed fences, as of old, and Nanny was as fond as ever of perching herself on topmost bars to frighten Harry, and often tore her dresses as of yore; but, for her mother's sake, she learned to mend them herself; and then, for her own sake, she was more careful not to tear them.

Harry never ceased to rejoice that it was not his lot to wear a dress, although he was often filled with admiration at his sisters' and at Nanny's; more especially when she was dressed all in white in the summer, and danced over the lawn with Alice, in pursuit of fireflies, which he was always obliged to capture for them. And somehow Nanny's always happened to be the largest and brightest.

## **NELLIE'S PROTECTOR.**

**BY ANNA MORRIS.**

"If there is one thing more tiresome than another in this world, it certainly is waiting in an old poky depot, all alone, instead of having some one here to meet me, and being half way to Clara's house by this time." And Nellie Lathrop concluded this expression of her opinion by taking another impatient look out of the door of the ladies' room in the Albany depot.

No one was apparently looking for a stray damsel. In fact, she could see no one but a porter or two busy with some luggage.

She walked up and down the room, and presently ventured out on to the long platform, and paced to and fro like a sentry on duty.

"It's too bad!" she soliloquized. "Clara wrote that she would surely have her brother here waiting on the arrival of the train.

She knows I never was in Boston before, and I begin to think I never want to come again, if this is the way I am to be treated."

Here something seemed to have got into Nellie's eye—perhaps a cinder—for she winked rapidly for a few seconds, and then with a more composed air continued her promenade.

"Clara lives in Newton, she wrote, but how do I know where that is, or what to do if I could find it? I did very well so long as that lady and her baby were here, and I could talk to them; but now I am tired, and awful hungry, and there's no sign of anything to eat. I wish I dared to go out in the street and find a refreshment saloon, but I don't know my way a bit. I mean to go to the door and look out. Perhaps I shall see a saloon close by."

So saying, she proceeded to the Beach Street door, but that not affording any very inviting prospect, she turned to retrace her steps, when she saw some ladies pass through the narrow passage which leads to the other side of the building.

"I wonder what that is?" she thought. "I'll go through and see." Suiting the action to the word, she found herself in the "outward bound" side of the depot. Strolling curiously along, her eye was attracted by the display of eatables, and a few inquiries let her sufficiently into the mysteries of the place to enable her to find her way to the dining-room and procure some breakfast.

The discovery that there were two waiting-rooms troubled her somewhat. Clara's brother might have come to one in search of her, while she was in the other.

"I am sure he did not come to the one I waited in so long," she thought, "for I am quite confident I know just how he looks. Rather short, and fair, with blue eyes like Clara's, of course, and no gentleman came in there but that tall one with such a lovely dark beard. I remember thinking he was waiting for some one, because he just came in and looked about and went out again. I was playing with the baby while its mother was putting her shawl in its strap. I will inquire of the waiter which side I should stay."

But other passengers had come in; the waiter was very busy, and in reply to Nellie's question only said "this side," understanding that she expected to meet friends going away.

Time dragged on. Nellie again paced up and down the platform, and finally thought she would go to the other side and see if she could make any discoveries. In passing through the passage she met the gentleman she had seen in the morning—he of the "lovely dark beard"—but no one was in the waiting-room.

Once more returning, she found a train nearly ready to start, and heard Newton called as one of its stopping-places.

"I have a great mind to go to the conductor and ask if he knows where Mr. Sandford, Clara's husband, lives. It can't do any harm." And stepping forward, she made the inquiry.

The polite conductor shook his head. "I do not know, miss," he said. "Does he live at the Corner?"

"Where?" asked Nellie, bewildered.

"At the Corner. Newton Corner we used to call it, you know," explained the conductor.

But Nellie did *not* know, and hinted as much.

"O, then, perhaps it is at the Centre, or possibly Newtonville, or West Newton. They are all Newton," was the next information she received.

This was more than Nellie had bargained for, and she beat a hasty retreat to the waiting-room. Another hour went by. No one appeared to claim her, and she began to feel seriously uneasy. She ventured out a little way, "just to see what Boston was like," and coming back again encountered the "lovely dark bearded" individual, who was just leaving the depot.

"He must have some employment in the building," thought Nellie, "or he would not be here so much." And once more she watched and waited with what patience she might.

Finally she got some dinner, and finding it was three o'clock, she resolved to go to Newton, and if unsuccessful, return in time to take the right train for New York.

The conductor whom she now accosted was quite as ignorant of Mr. Sandford's existence as his brother official, and again the bewildering words "Newton Corner, Newton Centre, Newtonville and West Newton," were rung in her ears. In desperation she purchased her ticket for *Newton*, and in consequence was soon left at the Corner.

What to do next was now the question. The station-master had never heard of Mr. Sandford, neither had any one in the stores where she inquired. At last a man who happened to overhear her, said that he believed there was a family named Sandford, or Sampson, or something of that kind, who had lately moved into town.

"O where?" cried Nellie, eagerly; but he could not give any precise information. The expressman had told him that he had brought out furniture for them, and he believed it was somewhere in the direction of Silver Lake.

After a few more questions as to the whereabouts of Silver Lake, Nellie hired a carriage at the depot, and started in quest of the family named "Sandford, or Sampson, or something."

It proved a fruitless search, and about

dark Nellie found herself once more at the Newton station, with apparently no alternative but to return to New York without seeing her friend.

"And to-morrow will be Christmas," she thought, regretfully, "and I anticipated so much pleasure in spending it with Clara. I wish I had waited until next week, as father wished, when the Lawtons are coming to Boston, and would have taken care of me."

She put her hand into her pocket, intending to pay the hackman, but no pocket-book was to be found.

"Why, where is my portemonnaie?" she exclaimed, and hurriedly pulled out her handkerchief and the key of her trunk, but they concealed no pocket-book. "It must be in my bag." And in a twinkling the bag was unclasped and its contents inspected, but all in vain.

"What shall I do?" cried the poor girl, in dismay. "I must have dropped it when I paid for my ticket to come out here. I know I had it then."

"Don't you think you could find it if you tried?" asked the hackman, sneeringly. "Ladies generally know where they put their money."

Nellie looked at him in terror. She had never been spoken to in such a manner, and did not attempt a reply.

The man proceeded with a series of similar remarks. The platform happened to be nearly deserted, and he warmed with his subject, till he poured forth a torrent of abuse, first threatening his unfortunate passenger with arrest, and then demanding her watch in payment.

Finally Nellie, who had at first seemed half stupefied, recovered in some degree her self-possession, and moved towards the door of the ladies' room, intending to appeal to the station-master for assistance.

"No you don't!" cried the driver, who was evidently much the worse for liquor. "You shan't dodge me that way." And he caught her roughly by the arm.

"Hands off, sir!" said a stern voice behind him; and as the man turned to see who thus interfered, Nellie again beheld, in the character of her deliverer, the possessor of the "lovely dark beard."

The gentleman saw that she was trembling with fear and excitement, and escorting her into the ladies' room, begged to know if he could be of service.

"O, thank you!" said Nellie, with a half sob; "indeed, I should be very thankful if you will tell me what I can do."

There was a look of trustworthiness about her rescuer which made her feel that she might confide her troubles to him, and she at once proceeded to do so.

"I came from New York this morning," she said, simply, "intending to visit a friend in Newton. She was to send some one to meet me in Boston, and therefore gave me no particulars of her whereabouts here; but I waited nearly all day in Boston, and as no one came for me I resolved to come out to Newton and try to find my friend, but—"

"Excuse me," interrupted her listener, "but is it possible that you are Miss Lathrop?"

"That is my name," replied Nellie, in surprise.

"And mine is Frederick Stanhope—Mrs. Sandford's brother," continued the gentleman. "I do not know how this mistake has occurred. I have searched for you all day. I was at the depot when the train arrived this morning, but could find no lone and unprotected female. Did you go into the waiting-room?"

"Yes," answered Nellie, laughing as though she had forgotten all the discomfort of the day; "and you came in there and looked about, but as I had made up my mind that you looked just like Clara, I never thought that you might be searching for me."

"But I only saw two ladies with a baby," rejoined Mr. Stanhope.

"Yes, I was playing with the child of one of my fellow-passengers," explained Nellie.

"Then I went away," continued her companion, "but felt anxious, knowing how confident Clara was that you would arrive this morning. So I returned somewhat later, and searched in both sides of the depot."

"Yes, and passed me in the passage between the two," interposed Nellie; "and then I met you again at the door, still later."

"That time I had to go on some other business," replied Mr. Stanhope. "I noticed you, but had no reason to suppose that you were the lady I was sent to meet. Indeed, if the idea had crossed my mind, that last meeting would have convinced me

of my mistake, for you were then coming in from the street with your bag, like any of the hundreds of ladies whom I met there. But I am keeping you waiting here, while Clara is blaming me for not telegraphing to your father, and for not inquiring in the baggage-room if your trunk had come, and for not doing sundry other things that never entered my brain. Indeed, she has talked ever since I came home this afternoon, till I was now on my way back to Boston, to make what amends I could. I am most thankful that I arrived in time to save you from further annoyance. Will you come now?" he continued, taking up her shawl and bag. "We live but a few steps from here, although it appears that none of our neighbors are as yet aware of the fact."

"But that hackman?" asked Nellie, shrinking back.

"He will not trouble you again," answered Mr. Stanhope; "but if you will wait here a moment I will settle with him." And he left the room as he spoke.

In a few moments he returned, with an amused expression on his countenance.

"Is this some of your property, Miss Lathrop?" he inquired, handing her a muff.

"O yes, thank you!" cried Nellie. "I must have left it in the carriage. How careless of me! And the hackman could not have been so bad as he seemed, or he would not have given it to you," she added.

"He did not," answered Mr. Stanhope, dryly. "It crossed my mind that you might have dropped your portemonnaie in the carriage, so I went to look, and found this lying on the seat, and—"

"And my portemonnaie in it," exclaimed Nellie, who had just put her hands into her muff, preparatory to venturing out in the cold.

"So I discovered," laughed Mr. Stanhope, "for it dropped out when I picked up the muff."

"Well, father was certainly right," said Nellie, "when he said that I did not know how to take care of myself."

Mr. Stanhope did not reply at the time, but a few weeks later, after the Merry Christmas and the pleasant days that followed it were fast bringing Nellie's visit to a close, he referred to this remark, and so eloquently that he succeeded in getting himself appointed to the post of Nellie's Protector.



## NIMBLE JIM.

BY CARRIE D. BEEBE.

HE wasn't a man or a boy, or even a baby—only a very intelligent coachdog, black, with white spots. His master was a physician, and Nimble Jim used always to run under his carriage very swiftly, never seeming to tire; and that is how he came by his name. He was a very wise dog, not given alone to trained tricks, but always doing some ridiculous original thing which went to prove that a dog's instinct approaches very closely to reason, sometimes. For instance, whenever he was scolded he would lift up one foot and walk on the other three, seeming almost too lame to hobble about, and he would sigh just like any person who was in deep trouble.

One day Nimble Jim's master, Dr. Clarke, for some good reason discharged his old coachman, of whom the dog was very fond; and Nimble Jim, highly indignant, left for parts unknown. In vain his master advertised for him—he was not to be found.

In a very quiet portion of the city lived little Miss Gray, in a small two-story brick house of her own. She was fond of pets, and kept innumerable canaries, finches and all manner of birds, even a parrot. She had a dog, too, which died, to her great sorrow. Soon after, while walking in the street one evening, she met a coachdog, who seemed to be very lame, for he limped along before her, and sighed as if in great distress. She had a paper of cookies, fresh from the bak-

er's, in her hand, and pitying the poor brute, she tossed him one, calling him a "poor doggie!" and patting him on the head. He swallowed the cake, frisked about her on all four of his feet, and then stood upon his hind ones and begged for more. Miss Gray laughed, and gave him another cake, telling him he was a "dreadful cheat," and a "trained beggar," but wishing all the while she had such a dog for her own.

Of course it was Nimble Jim; and, either he understood her wishes, and thought it very impolite to refuse them, or he fancied her greatly himself, for he followed her to her door, and ran into the house without so much as an invitation from Miss Gray. He went into her little sitting-room and jumped about, to the great surprise of the birds. Polly, the parrot, was the first to recover herself.

"How d'ye do?" said she. "What's your name? Shake hands! Kiss me!" And then she snapped her bill as if kissing somebody, and laughed "ha! ha!"

Nimble Jim was astonished. But he was accustomed to take things coolly, and he made no remark, like a sensible dog, for if he had been very noisy, Miss Gray would, in all probability, have put him out of the house. As it was, they got along admirably,—Nimble Jim, the birds and Miss Gray.

One day Miss Gray went out to walk, and, as usual, Nimble Jim was close at her

heels. Presently he began to bark, and running briskly to the opposite side of the street, he caught the coat-skirts of a gentleman who was upon the opposite sidewalk, kissed his hands, and showed, as well as a dog could, how delighted he was to see him. The gentleman seemed glad, too, for he patted the dog on the head and called him a "runaway," and "good fellow!" And then Nimble Jim ran back to Miss Gray and pulled her dress until the little woman could hardly stand upon her feet. Next he frisked over to the gentleman, and caught him by the coat and tried to bring him over to where Miss Gray was.

The gentleman crossed the street and said, very politely:

"Madam, Nimble Jim evidently wishes to introduce us. I am Dr. Clarke, his old master."

"And I," returned she, "am Miss Gray, and have lodged and fed the dog since he came to me a month ago."

At this Nimble Jim barked joyfully, and kissed both their hands, and acted so overjoyed altogether that the people in the street began to collect about them, and Miss Gray was terrified into asking Dr. Clarke into her house to discuss the matter more quietly.

Polly greeted him in her usual affectionate manner, and the doctor was so delighted with the interview that he begged leave to call again, and to make a short story still shorter, before two month had passed he married little Miss Gray, and took her, with the birds and Nimble Jim, to his home, making a second "happy family." And they got along in the pleasantest way in the world, the doctor, little Mrs. Clarke, the canaries, finches, Polly, and Nimble Jim.

## NINA'S CURLS.

BY M. T. CALDOR.

### CHAPTER I.

"You're a lucky dog," said my old chum, Charlie Saunders, as he parted from me at the club-house, and left me to pursue my way towards my uncle's office.

And it must be confessed something very like the same agreeable declaration was repeated by the inner man, as I sauntered slowly along the promenade, whither a clear bright day had brought its multitude of worshippers.

"To be sure it is not every young fellow who can come out from the university, and step into such a situation as I have good reason to believe lies ready for my acceptance. In the first place, the position it will confer upon a man—the sort of government stamp it puts upon a fellow, saying to the world, 'There is an article thoroughly tested, and pronounced genuine and desirable'—is no unenviable gift at the commencement of a career. One would be glad to accept it even for a meagre recompense. But beyond that, the salary is generous, and I shall likewise fulfil my heartiest longing, and spend one or two seasons in Paris. To have an uncle powerful enough to ensure me such an office would be good fortune enough for one man, but that the late incumbent should die at the very moment I am ready to enter into it, is certainly rare good fortune. Poor fellow! I don't want to rejoice at his death. Not at all; but if death must come, why, it is exceedingly gratifying that I am thus enabled to secure my long-desired position!"

So ran my thoughts, as I tripped along with a step as elastic as my thoughts were buoyant. I had a merry nod for all my gay comrades, the very brightest smile for all my pretty lady acquaintances, and a suave bow even for the most disagreeable people I met in the hurrying crowd. I had no fault to find with any one or anything. The world was beautiful, and kind, and gracious. I somehow ignored the existence of crime, and sin, and dreary want—of fraud, and trickery, and sham. I inhaled the delicious perfume, I admired the glowing hue of life's roses. What marvel that I would not be conscious of thorns?

How beautiful it is, when this overflowing effervescence of inward content and gladness glorifies all surrounding objects! An hour afterwards I asked myself ruefully if it could be the same scene I passed through with slow and haggard step, with sobered anxious rumination.

But I entered my uncle's office with a complacent smile, and a heart unquestioning the certainty of my expectations. My uncle had not yet arrived from his residence. The grave important-looking secretary looked up from the pile of papers before him, and announced the fact, at the same time motioning towards the inner sanctum, where I knew only a few privileged characters were admitted.

I walked in, and settled myself comfortably in the great easy-chair covered with green Russia leather, and looked around me with calm meditative eyes. What momentous matters had this little room heard discussed! what mighty decisions had here been rendered! For there was no one who disputed the amount of influence this calm-minded, far-seeing, deep-thinking uncle of mine exercised in both Houses, ay, over the Premier himself. It was to his deep-searching gaze all the doubtful questions were brought, all the knotty arguments, all the perplexing expedients. What profound wisdom, what varied knowledge, what thorough acquaintance with all the shifting phases of politics he manifested. I looked upon him with a vague sense of awe, as well as admiration. He was for me an infallible oracle.

So now, looking around me in this little dim dusty sanctum, every article had a peculiar signification and importance. I looked with instinctive respect upon the pen thrown carelessly upon the writing-desk, with the ink dried in a thick mass on its nib, as though it had been dipped hastily into the massive stand, and then thrown suddenly away unused. Might not a single stroke from it give me the desired boon? Ah, what a wonderful thing it was to have such a great man in the family—and to come back to Charlie Saunders—what a lucky dog was I!

I rose at once when I heard my uncle's step, and stood, hat in hand, as he came into the sanctum. Was it all my fancy, that the moment his eye fell upon me a shade of annoyance crossed his face? My nonchalance was slightly dashed.

"Good-morning, sir!" in a voice a trifle less triumphant than I had intended, said I, bowing, with the utmost respect.

"Ah, Phil! how are you this morning? How are all the good people at your house? for I conclude you have just come from the country."

"We are all quite well, thank you, sir. We saw the notice of the death of the Hon. Mr. Fitz William, and my mother sent me at once to see you about it. It leaves the post vacant, I suppose, which you referred to when you came down to the Cove last month."

"Hum, hum! yes, undoubtedly the post is vacated, since Mr. Fitz William is dead. I'm sorry I spoke about it, though. I hope I haven't raised your expectations too high. It's a pity. I remember that your mother was always unreasonably sanguine, and took every disappointment to heart. I hope you haven't all of you calculated too positively upon this point, eh, Phil?"

I tried to stand unconcernedly, and appear indifferent, but it was of no use. I felt the color surging into my cheeks. I was almost certain there was a mist of tears in my eyes, and I knew my voice quavered as I replied:

"Indeed, sir, from your remarks that day we took a great deal of encouragement, and we have made great capital out of so brilliant a prospect; for, you know, I am the eldest of a large family, and it will be a great relief to the family purse, as well as pride, when I am safely in the way of taking care of myself, and giving some of the others a friendly lift."

As I said this, I sank down into the counting-chair opposite the leather easy-chair, for actually the sudden shock had taken away all my strength, and looked up deprecatingly into the face of my august relative.

There was a black frown there. The bushy eyebrows knit themselves fiercely, the thin lips were working in and out with vexation and impatience.

"It's a great pity, lad. You can't feel half so badly about it as I do. Tell your mother so. I was wrong to be so positive,

but I had not a doubt then but that it lay in my power to procure the post for you, as soon as Fitz William resigned. I had spoken to the Premier about it, and everything was all right. So it would be now, but for that Jezebel!" He spoke the last words between his closed teeth, and sitting down before the desk, he took up the penholder lying there, and snapping it as if it had been straw, flung the pieces on the floor. "To be fooled and cheated by a woman! to be compelled to yield to that Jezebel! It is shameful! It is preposterous!" he muttered, fiercely.

I stared at him, the sharpness of my own disappointment making me numb, and stupid to comprehend his excitement.

"Then you think there is no chance for me?" ventured I, faintly.

"I do, indeed, Phil. It cuts me to the heart to say it, for I have gloated over this post as the very thing to advance you to an honorable course. I have counselled your education in especial adaptation to it; and I say again it is more disappointment to me than to you, however sorely you may grieve over it. I could bite out my own tongue for encouraging you to think so much about it. I know very well what keen trials are such disappointments to ardent young spirits like yours. I've dreaded to see you, because I knew I must tell you that the post will have to go to some one else. It is a painful, a hateful necessity. O that Jezebel! that she should have wit enough to compass her ends in this style!"

"I am very, very sorry," stammered I, beginning to perceive that his anger far exceeded mine; "but I will not try to take it very desperately. I am young and strong, and not particularly dull-witted. It will be hard if there is not an opening somewhere—I dare say I shall soon forget all about it."

"But I shan't," growled my uncle. "To be circumvented in this way. To be made a cat's-paw to haul out this goodly post for that rascally son of hers. It is too much. And the Premier is as wrathful as myself, that we must give it to that young dog."

"How!" exclaimed I, in astonishment, "do you give that coveted situation to one you dislike, and bestow it unwillingly? That is strange, indeed!"

My uncle turned toward me with a sudden vehemence which might well startle me.

"Phil, you smart young scamp, why can't you show yourself equal to the family expectations? Come, come, you shall earn this post for yourself. I tell you, lad, there is just one chance for it. Will you try for it?"

"Only give me the chance," cried I, springing to my feet with renewed courage.

"Good! You shall have a chance for the chance. I will put you in possession of the facts—I know you are too much like your mother to use the knowledge wrongfully! Then you may make the most of it."

I rubbed my hands in eager zest for the trial, and my uncle smiled approvingly ere he began.

"Well, Phil, your whole task will lie in outreaching, circumventing a woman, a very Jezebel of a woman. The Evil One himself must have taught her his cunning, for she baffles all our efforts with the utmost coolness. I have had three of the most adroit detectives on from Paris, and though they came with the utmost assurance, they have retired in despair. What do you say to that?"

"It only incites me to keener zeal. What attraction is there in a task any dolt can accomplish?" I replied, with all the bravado of youth.

My uncle patted me on the shoulder.

"Bravo, bravo, Phill! You revive my fainting spirits. Only outwit that woman, and I'll double your allowance out of my own income."

"Give me the facts, sir," cried I, with feverish interest.

"You shall have them. You know very well, lad, that in a political position like ours there must be a great many concealed movements; a great many sham appearances, and not a few state secrets and disagreeable subterfuges. Well, it so happened that something like three months ago it seemed best to ruling powers to open certain secret negotiations with another nation. You understand, a movement like throwing out skirmishers from an army to feel the enemy's strength and disposition, not a genuine *bona fide* attack. Immediately after such proceedings had been set on foot, certain events in another quarter of the globe entirely changed the aspect of affairs, and made what had seemed wise and proper, promise only humiliating and disastrous results. It became imperatively

necessary to have back the papers and instructions given to sundry secret agents, or the good name and position of our leading statesmen, as well as the reputation of the whole Parliament, might suffer. We went to work energetically, and succeeded in recalling everything. I had gathered together all traces of the transaction which could do harm, and was waiting for the arrival of a certain nobleman, that the whole might be examined by him, and then burnt in his presence, when this Witch of Endor, this Jezebel, fluttering in her silks and laces, her plumes and jewels, sailed into my room, and in those satanic musical tones of hers, begged that she might be allowed to see Lord — a moment. She had been told at — House that she would find him here. She would detain his lordship but a moment. She was such an impatient creature she could not wait any longer, and she knew the only way to secure a moment's talk was to seize him wherever he could be found. She hoped I would not be angry with her for the intrusion. And she smiled into my face with those great eyes of hers, and I was fool enough to humor her. I drew out the easy-chair, and brought a fan, and set myself to entertain her. I threw a newspaper over the desk, covering up those papers, and felt easy about them. She sat there and talked on in that bewitching way which they tell me fascinates every man who comes near her, and I, like a fool, listened, and answered, and was even pleased that his lordship delayed his coming so long. But he came at last, and I could see plainly was as much amused as annoyed to find the famous Madame Armstrong, the noted beauty and acknowledged leader of fashion, closeted with the old bachelor politician in his dry musty sanctum. I dryly stated the lady's errand, but before I was half through she had swooped upon him like a hawk upon its prey.

"Now, Lord —, dear wicked Lord —, you're not to cheat me any longer with your dry excuses. I've come to ensure your presence at my ball to-morrow night. I really cannot consent to be so ungallantly treated. I am quite determined that you shall yield. See how much pains I have taken. I have spent all my morning watching for you. There are ever so many lions coming, and how mortified I shall be to miss your face among them!"

"The creature smiled, and prattled, and

ogled away his lordship's good sense, of course, and he made her the promise. What should the woman do then but sweep up to my desk, where all those papers were lying, and playfully throwing off the newspaper, hunt up for herself pen and paper. And, still in that arch merry fashion, she drew up a promise which his lordship duly signed. And then after a complimentary invitation to me, she condescended to take her leave.

"A handsome woman, and deucedly smart, eh?" observed his lordship, evidently not a little flattered by her desire for his presence at the fete.

"I did not mind confirming his opinion, and then we set to work. I went out and gave my men orders that no one, positively no one, must be admitted. They took it for a rebuke, and explained how the lady would not listen to their objections, but found her way here alone.

"His lordship and myself then turned to our papers. As fast as we read we burned. When we came to the last one I gave a great shout.

"Where are the two notes of agreement with the red seals?" cried I.

"His lordship began searching over the table, but I sat dumb with consternation.

"That woman!" vociferated I, as soon as speech returned.

"What do you mean?" demanded his lordship, growing pale with alarm.

"It was all a feint, her wish to obtain your presence at her party. She wanted an excuse to get here to my papers. The wretch—the plotter—the Jezebel!"

"Well, Phil, we searched and searched. Those most important papers of all were missing. That woman had artfully obtained them. She has them now."

My uncle drew a long breath, wiped away the moisture from his forehead, and added, less excitedly:

"What do you think of the matter now, Phil?"

"It certainly looks as if she took the papers. Of course you are positive that they were here when she came in here."

"Of course, indeed! Besides, we are saved the deliberation of that matter. The lady comes forward in the most suave manner possible, and she asks that her son may receive the post which the Hon. Mr. Fitz Williams is to vacate. We stare at her in the most frigid manner, whereupon she

very mildly hints of certain knowledge in our possession, which will make it worth our while to propitiate her favor. His lordship, sneering in the politest manner, remarks that suspicion is a mere breath. The lady, with her blandest smile, replies that proofs in black and white with red seals are quite different.

"There we are again. We are obliged to be conciliatory in appearance, if not at heart. Those papers must not be made public, and if there is no other way to obtain them, that fellow must have the post she asks for him. But we mean to hold out as long as possible. As I said before, there have been French detectives at work, and they declare they have searched thoroughly every nook and corner, every article of furniture and apparel, every conceivable place for hiding those papers, in that immense house of hers, and without avail. I declare to you, when I meet her I have an insane longing to rush upon that woman and tear her limb from limb. The malicious triumph on her handsome face is quite enough to drive one frenzied. Now, Phil, you know everything. Besides securing for yourself this coveted situation, your success will make me your debtor for life."

"At least I can make the attempt. I can but fail," answered I, gravely. "I will see you again after I have matured some plan for action."

"Let me hear speedily, for remember there is more than one on the rack until those papers are returned."

I took my departure, and retraced my steps in rather a dismal frame of mind.

## CHAPTER II.

CAREFUL inquiries concerning Madame Armstrong confirmed my first impression, that I had a wary, adroit, cool-brained antagonist, and that the task I had set for myself was no light or hopeful one. Nevertheless, a certain dogged determination took possession of me, and no amount of persuasion could have turned me from my purpose.

I learned a great deal concerning madame, who was a woman exceedingly admired and respected, the brilliant leader in the high circle into which she had introduced herself. I saw Hugh Armstrong, the weakly, rather effeminate son, a most ridiculous in-

cumbent for the post of honor I had coveted, one would say, except that those who knew him at his weakest, knew also his mother's keen sharp wit and quick intellect, her wonderful tact, her resolute diplomacy, and were aware in her hands would lie all the management of the affair.

I was pleased to learn of one foible in Madame Armstrong's character. She was extremely fastidious, and haughtily stern with her servants; therefore there was a continual change going on in her establishment. This explained how it had been allowed to the French detectives to so thoroughly explore the mansion. I would not trouble myself to go over the same ground. I knew how thoroughly the French policeman does his work. I felt convinced that they were right as far as they had gone. I should look only in places which had never occurred to them. I had only a few ideas in my head, but I clung to a vague belief that when once in the household, inspiration would come to me.

How to ingratiate myself into that position was the sharpest study. Of course I was not to allow any suspicion of my connection or knowledge of my uncle. Fortune favored me in the commencement, inasmuch as I discovered that there was a young girl in the family who had taken a fancy to drawing, and needed a master. I had always been a warm lover of the brush and pencil both. I furbished up my talents that way, and boldly presented myself before Madame Armstrong with the necessary credentials.

I was struck with her appearance even beyond what I had anticipated. She was indeed a magnificent woman, and for one of her years, her beauty was wonderful. I was shown by a servant into a room purple-hung and purple-hued; for the light filtered through heavy falls of violet silk, gold-fringed, and supported by massive gilded bands. From the haziness of a great velvet armchair rose before me a tall grandly-moulded figure, which breathed of purple likewise, bearing itself as regally as Zenobia or Cleopatra could have done. A dress of violet satin trimmed with wide folds of velvet of the same color—only in richer deeper shades—swept down her fine form, every fold falling as gracefully as if a sculptor's hand had smoothed it with careful tenderness. Under the flow of rippling lace at wrist and throat, shone a reddish yellow

glow of broad bands of purest gold. Stars of amethyst, with just one white gleam from a diamond centre, swung from her ears, and sparkled along the comb which confined heavy coils of black hair still without any perceptible silvering. Her features were rather massive, but they suited her figure. Her complexion in her youthfulness must have been fairly dazzling, and was still brilliant without artificial aid. The eyes were well-shaped, dark and bright. Only one feature was distasteful. The mouth was cruel, crafty, thoroughly evil. But she managed it dexterously, and with the lips parted away from two rows of pearly teeth in gentle smile, you forgot its repulsive character.

Such was the lady who came slowly towards me, as I stood meekly in her drawing-room in the humble character of drawing-master. She addressed me in matter-of-fact tone, asked for my credentials, and specimens of my work. When the latter were produced I saw plainly that she took no true interest in them, for though she glanced carelessly over them, her attention was rather given to me. Was she a good physiognomist, and was she seeking to judge of my character by that cool scrutinizing eye? I kept on the most stolid expression, inwardly marvelling at my own self-possession. What did she want of me? Certainly not as a drawing-master; that was but the pretence for obtaining my services.

"I hope you are something of a French scholar, Mr. Brown," said she, presently, toying lightly with one of my sketches, and keeping her glittering on my face.

I bowed respectfully, carefully concealing all show of surprise.

"I have been considered so. I have given especial attention to writing and translating French, although my later fancy for the pencil has somewhat superseded the study."

She looked pleased.

"My idea was to secure the permanent services of some one who could teach my niece to draw, and give the rest of his time to my service—something like an amanuensis and teacher combined."

I remained silent, hoping to obtain a more thorough explanation.

"Of course," continued she, coldly, "your salary will be increased in proportion to your services."

I bowed again:

"Well," said she, the impatient imperi-

ousness of which I had heard so much breaking out thus early, "one would think you had been turned into a statue by my proposition. Will you condescend to give me your opinion in the matter? I agree to your price for the drawing-lessons, and I will treble it for your services in the other line. Do you agree?"

It was my earnest desire to impress upon madame the genuineness of my proffered service. I stood a moment reckoning half-audibly the sum named, and then added, in a hesitating questioning tone, like one eager to obtain all that was possible:

"I will say yes, if my board is taken into the account, and I am allowed two hours every day to attend to an engagement I cannot afford to drop. You understand, madame, that drawing lessons are more profitable than French, and if I give up the former, I require an extra compensation."

I looked up deprecatingly into her face, expecting to see a look of disgust. On the contrary, I fancied this greedy parsimonious spirit I had counterfeited pleased her.

"So, so," thought I, "she fancies I am the more serviceable tool!"

"Of course I expected you to remain in my house and dine at my table. If you are obliging and faithful, I do not think we shall quarrel about the terms. I will make you acquainted with your drawing pupil. I am confident you will find her apt. The child has a wonderful tact."

"Your daughter, madame, I presume," said I, allowing a look of the most respectful admiration to cross my face, as I glanced over her superb form and handsome face.

She was too much of a woman to notice it, and smiling calmly while she swept back the lace ends floating from her headdress, led the way across a spacious hall, up a flight of stairs into a little Arcadian bower, built out from the main building with three sides of glass, and blossoming like any tropic garden, with row upon row of rich exotics. In the centre of this charming boudoir was a small marble basin, into which a narrow stream of tinkling water fell, arching from the marble fingers of a weeping naiad like a rainbow of silver. Rich Persian rugs covered the marble-flagged floor, and their glowing velvety hues were only outvied by the gorgeous blossoms beyond. A quaintly-carved table, the supports three struggling batchanalians, and the table itself an overturned basket for

whose falling grapes they were struggling, stood in the centre. A bamboo easel, and a marble tray heaped with books was near it, and a single divan, piled with luxurious cushions of deep blue velvet with silver tassels and cording, was wheeled in front of the table. A crystal dish heaped with fruit completed the picture. At least, I thought so, until the mistress of this exquisite apartment came tripping lightly from a miniature grove of orange and oleander, into our presence.

Was this my pupil? Or was it not rather some Circe this new mistress of mine had evoked from the flowers, to beguile my wits away and turn me from my purpose? A more innocent guileless shape a wily enchantress could not take. A slender girlish figure, willowy and straight, and lithe as that of an Arab maiden; a pure sweet childish face, and yet with an expression of rare womanliness in the wide violet eyes, the tranquil serenity of her smile. But it was her hair which woke my first admiration—How lustrous, and fine, and soft, and bewilderingly graceful were those short wavy ringlets! not stiff formal curls, but a mass of little twining rings of inconceivably graceful curves and twinings, something akin to the clinging convolutions of the grapevine, of the richest possible bronze, which could not be called red, and was too golden to come into the browns. It was left free to its own sweet will, saving for a carelessly-knotted ribbon of blue, spotted with silver butterflies. Well might those airy children of the light love to cling amid such a cloud of shining sunbeams! And the glossy rings curled lovingly around the broad white forehead, and rippled playfully against the slender white throat.

There was no elegance of costume to complete the picture of this rare Eastern apartment by a presiding princess. The girl wore a loosely flowing dress of some gauzy fabric of pure white, with a broad blue ribbon tied around the waist. But for such loveliness as hers, simplicity is the rarest jewel. Gems, and velvets, and trailing satin were the becoming attributes of Madame Armstrong, but for her niece, Nina L'Estrange, they were useless and cumbersome ornaments. One would as soon think of setting a diamond in a lily's heart, to mar its purity, and despoil its fragrance, or of giving a violet a satin bed instead of its chosen mossy bank.



"Nina," said madame, in her clear trumpet-like tones, "you wished the other day for instruction in your drawing. See, I have brought you a teacher!"

"Ah, how good you always are about such things, my aunt. I thank you very much. It will beguile so many dull hours."

"What, pet, does ennui come here amidst your birds, and books, and flowers? I thought nothing was to mar your happiness when I gave you this boudoir."

Nina hung her fair head till the curling clouds of bronzed curls veiled her blushing cheek.

"You were right. I was a silly child to think I could always be contented, even with such beautiful playthings."

She made a little caressing movement as if she would have thrown her arms around the lady's neck, but Madame Armstrong drew back with a little shiver of repugnance, which, though it was gone in a second, was plainly recognized, not alone by me, but by Nina herself. The girl drew herself up with a proud smile, singularly blended with pain and indignation.

"Perhaps the gentleman would like to examine your capabilities. Take him into your sitting-room. I shall be busy for an hour or two, Mr. Brown, then I will see you in the library. Nina, this is Mr. Brown, who is to teach you drawing. This, sir, is Miss L'Estrange, your pupil."

Madame Armstrong went through with this little speech rather hastily, swept a stately courtesy, and was gone. Her niece stood with crossed arms and drooping head several minutes after her departure, as if entirely unconscious of my presence.

I waited quietly for her to recover from whatever abstraction had come upon her, and turned my attention to the shells, rosy-lipped and rare, which shone under the brim of the marble basin of the fountain, stealing now and then, I must acknowledge, a furtive glance into the sweet pensive face. Presently a slow smile broke over the rosy lips, and she murmured, lightly:

"What matter? Why should I spoil this new enjoyment by old doubts?" And coming forward to my side, she said, with charming simplicity, "I knew you would not mind if I waited till she was gone before I spoke to you. I am so glad to see you. I am sure you will not leave me dull and listless, as the flowers and birds do."

"I hope not, I am sure, mademoiselle.

You have a charming picture here. I should not mind copying it with my pencil."

"Ah, I have done it half a dozen times, and tried to color the flowers. But it is so unsatisfactory. It makes me so angry at the presumption of attempting it, and so ashamed of my lack of skill. I will bring them to you; or rather, you will please come to them; the portfolio is so heavy."

She led the way through a narrow aisle, bordered with tall plants on either side, under a floral archway into an aviary almost as gay as the conservatory, since it almost seemed that some of the blossoms there had stolen wings and caught the breath of life, so gorgeous was the coloring of the flashing breasts and waving pinions of the tiny songsters, gathered there from every clime and shore.

She made a moment's pause to answer the chirrup of a canary, to whistle back the salute of a rich-voiced mocking-bird, and fillip the great beak of a gray African parrot, who cried out, "Here is Nina! poor Nina!" Then, without a glance at the others, passed on into a small luxuriously-furnished room combining library, parlor and drawing-room; for while one side was entirely filled with books, the other three were hung with pictures, filled up with brackets supporting graceful statuary, and littered with all the variety of elegant *bijouterie* pertaining to modern drawing-rooms.

Nina L'Estrange wheeled forward a portfolio-stand, and hunted up from a choice collection of fine engravings her own little sketches. She put them into my hand with a half-contemptuous smile.

"Say what you like about them. You cannot think so meanly about them as I do."

I looked them all over carefully before I gave my verdict. They were somewhat defective in execution, but the designs were spirited, many of them wonderfully graceful. Just such a rich oriental fancy, such a vivid imagination as the boudoir and aviary exhibited in their whole arrangement, looked out from these pictures. A mind richly gifted and singularly isolated, spending itself upon startling fancies, was laid open to my gaze from that moment.

I took up sketch after sketch, loath to leave them because of the girlish dreams they revealed. There was a whole series, pencilled evidently after she had read *Undine*. Through a great shower of spray was

the tiny figure, and the sweet innocent face peeping forth, with arms outstretched, as a child pushes its way through close-ranging bushes, an indescribably witching eerie smile on the lips, in response to the gaping wonder and astonishment of the old peasant. There was Undine in her sweet simplicity, dropping her snowflake hand into the eager grasp of the young knight, a whole world of tender trustfulness shining in the deep eyes. There was the journey through the Black Forest, and the frightened horse, and angry knight quailing before the raging torrent, which required a second glance to reveal through its foaming the evil malicious face of Kuniboud. And there was the commanding little water princess authoritatively waving back the infuriated demons. Saddest of all was the scene where the recreant knight has wedded the false one. The pair were rocking lightly in the tiny skiff upon the placid surface of the lake. But far down in the water lifted upward a pale, sad, tenderly reproachful face—the wraith of Undine. I looked over to Mademoiselle Nina, and drew my breath sharply.

"What a wonderful imagination is that of yours, mademoiselle. I can teach you something of the details, but what shall I give you to impart to me some of your exquisite fancy?"

"You are not jesting wantonly, I am sure. Ah, if you can only teach me to satisfy myself, how much pleasure and entertainment I shall find during the long days and months before me."

"Do you find so much time on your hands?" returned I, smilingly. "Most young ladies hardly believe the days long enough."

"Ah, that is because they have access to all I am debarred from."

I smiled again, as I glanced significantly around.

"Most of them would say your resources were far beyond an ordinary maiden's."

She smiled bitterly.

"Foolish creatures! Are they also discontented? Have they not free access to the world? Have they not friends who love them?" she said, in a vague dreary tone.

"And you—surely you also—" began I, and then paused abruptly.

"Yes, that is the problem. Are you wise enough to read it? My aunt heaps fine presents upon me; she consults my slightest whim, my wildest caprice, as you see in

the boudoir and aviary. Whatever plaything I ask for, however costly, it is brought to me. And yet she begrudges me the faintest show of affection."

"It is singular, certainly."

"It is incredible. She hunted me up when I was in poverty and obscurity, and brought me here to be fed and clothed like a princess. She is lavish in her indulgences, and yet she hates me. I can see it, I know it, and I—I do not love her. An icy wall seems always rising between us. I wonder and marvel, but find no explanation. When you come to know her better, you will likewise say that she is our modern Sphinx."

"I should think you would find friends enough among your young acquaintances," ventured I, moved by the wistful sadness of her eyes.

She turned them upon me in grave surprise.

"Don't you know that is another riddle, or a complication of the first? I never go out except in a close carriage, accompanied by her maid. I see no society, not even the guests who visit here. I only see her son Hugh, my maid and hers, week in and week out. Do you wonder I longed for birds and pets?"

"But that is injustice, actual imprisonment," cried I, indignantly.

"Something like it, I admit; but shall I return to the wretched poverty from which she took me? Shall I brave the perils which beset me there, alone, unaided, friendless? I have had wild dreams of a competence to be earned by my pencil, and then I have grown disgusted and ashamed of my own presumption. I think she has noticed that. I have been more listless than ever before, and that this explains the new indulgence of your presence. O, it is so refreshing to hear a fresh sympathizing voice. Let me forget other trials, and be happy again. Shall I tire of you so soon and so thoroughly as I did of birds and flowers, do you think?"

I could not refrain from smiling, as I replied:

"I will try to retain your interest, mademoiselle. Now, then, let us decide on the best method of drawing. For we will study together—both pupils, and Nature shall be our teacher."

She clapped her hands joyously, and all trace of weariness and languor vanished, as

she fitted to, and fro gathering together the materials. When Madame Armstrong entered the apartment, she found the drawing-master very respectfully and formally drawing out lines on the pasteboard, to show the pupil a careless habit she had acquired of running the marks into blotches.

Her sharp keen eye ran over our faces scrutinizingly, but I looked up with an indifferent air.

"Mademoiselle will make a very fine artist, with a little more practice. Now I am ready for your service, madame."

### CHAPTER III.

I MAY as well make my candid confession here, without trying to disguise the fact until the close of the story. In an incredibly short time, I had more interest in my drawing lesson than in the shrewd game I was secretly playing for my uncle. Indeed, I was often guiltily conscious of remissness when I met my uncle's anxious inquiring eye, in our chance meetings on the street. I knew very well why Madame Armstrong had engaged my services. It was to perfect her shallow-brained son in the diplomatic mysteries of the post he seemed likely to win. Although the French reading and writing was, ostensibly, for her own benefit, I did not fail to remark that Hugh Armstrong was always present; nor did I lack penetration for discovering the reason of her very singular selection of political papers for translation.

I was at a loss to explain her carelessness in allowing my free intimacy with Nina, but judged it must only come from her strong impression of my stolid mercenary character, which I lost no opportunity of deepening.

She casually remarked, in the early portion of my stay with them, that her niece was a penniless orphan, entirely dependent upon her charity, and that peculiar circumstances connected with the child's unhappy parentage made it desirable that she should be kept in strict seclusion.

She watched my face closely while she said it, but I flattered myself that I baffled her. I assumed an indifferent air, remarked that I pitied the poor child's loneliness, and was glad to brighten it by my drawing-lessons; but that it was a double misfortune, if there were circumstances which would prevent any hopes of an ultimate marriage

to relieve madame from her generous benevolence.

Madame Armstrong looked satisfied that matters were in a safe condition in the pretty room where the drawing-master gave his lessons. I fought down the rising ire in my breast—the singular but decided antagonism which I recognized as readily as my Nina—and turned calmly away.

Yes, she was to be my Nina sometime. We had spoken our betrothal vows solemnly, in the twinkling light of the stars, as they looked through the crystal windows of the boudoir, and something akin to their tremulous lustre sparkled on her long silken lashes, and—I am not ashamed to admit it—shone, likewise, on my cheek, as we vowed to wait patiently, through whatever vicissitudes, against however powerful obstacles, until our fondest hopes could be accomplished.

I had no regrets for the course I had taken, for I became more and more convinced of Madame Armstrong's intriguing character, her boundless ambition and reckless defiance of honorable considerations. I had worked so guardedly that I was confident she had no suspicion of my real motive for entering the household; and I had been admitted to share several secret correspondences not remarkably commendable in a lady of her position; but not the slightest clue had I obtained toward the furthering of my project, or the discovery of the missing papers. Yet, that they were in her possession was as certain as my blindness concerning them. I casually mentioned my uncle's name, one day in her presence, speaking as of a stranger, lauding his profound sagacity, his security from false moves and the like. I saw the glow glint exultingly across her eyes, the triumphant sneer curling that vindictive mouth, but averted my gaze, as she answered:

"So you think thus highly of him? Don't pin your faith too securely to any one, Mr. Brown. One of these days, I will tell a queer little anecdote, of how a lady outwitted this wonderful sage."

"Is it possible? What a wise lady you are, Madame Armstrong! Pray let me hear it now. I am dying of curiosity."

"No, not now, but in a month—two weeks, possibly. I promise you will be rarely entertained. I may give you a lesson in diplomacy, gratis. You've heard about hunting for a needle in a hay mound?

We've had a modern exemplification of the extraordinary search, and with about as much success."

Her mocking laugh rang defiantly in my ears. I went away, longing to stamp with rage at the woman's triumph.

I had two of the servants in my service, or rather, in my uncle's employ. But they were as far from the light as I. They brought me word one day, however, that they had discovered a small packet of papers, sealed or locked in a thin silver case, to which they could find no opening, and of which madame was evidently very choice.

I had heard of the case before. My predecessors had hunted it up, and opened it, of course. The contents were evidently of value, as they were the certificates and receipts of some large property, whose regular income was duly summed up in the different accounts. But they were not in Madame Armstrong's present name, although they had concluded it was the property inherited in her maiden right. The dressing-maid promised to bring me the case on a certain night, when madame was going to a great fete, and would be sure to leave it in her casket, to which, at such times, the girl always obtained the key.

On that very day before the fete, I had another interview with my uncle. He was fairly frantic with rage. Madame Armstrong had paid a visit to Lord —, and demanded an answer, and he had promised to give it the next afternoon.

"Of course," roared my uncle, "that booby son of hers must have the post, and everybody will wonder at our lack of discrimination, and he will make the whole thing ridiculous, if no deeper harm comes of it. Phil, Phil, if you can do anything, in the name of everything good, set about it, and execute it before to-morrow afternoon!"

I went back to my post in a melancholy humor, and was scarcely able to feign the proper admiration, when madame sent for me on the pretence of a letter she wished answered the next day, but in reality to exhibit herself in her ball costume. She had never looked more magnificently; she wore a rich velvet, of yellow hue, with all the glow of gold softened by a creamy lustre. Broad bands of dusky splendor, scintillating flashes of diamond and amethyst, spanned the still exquisitely-moulded arms, and circled the haughty throat; pendant sprays of

the same peerless gems drooped from the purple-black waves of luxuriant hair; her handkerchief was a costly web of intricate workmanship, her fan, a dainty toy, worth the whole income of many a better woman; the very buckle of her satin slipper was of gold, set with a tiny sparkle of diamond fire. I wondered if there would be a duchess at the fete more royally dressed, or more haughty in carriage, and secretly gnashed my teeth at the impotence of my indignation. She went away at last, and her son escorted her; and I waited impatiently for Celeste to find opportunity to keep the appointment without attracting the notice of the other servants.

She came tripping lightly into my room just as I was in despair of seeing her at all, and dropped the silver case into my hand.

"Pray be sure and give it back to me, monsieur, in time to return it before madame comes," she exclaimed.

"I nodded my acquiescence, and, with the case in my hand, went over to Nina's little conservatory, which was the most free from intrusion of any room in the whole mansion. I could hear the dear girl twittering her pretty compliments with the birds; but did not call her to me. I went with the case to the globe of light suspended from the ceiling, and, in a few minutes had mastered the secret of the spring. I seized upon the papers, and examined them hastily, to see if they corresponded with the minute description I had committed so closely to memory. No; there was no question about it. There was no seal upon either. My longed-for document was not among them.

I was bundling them together hastily, with a keen pang of disappointment, not caring to penetrate madame's secrets beyond what I felt legally empowered to do, when a name caught my eye. I spread open the paper with a shaking hand, and read every line of it. Nor did I pause until I had mastered the contents of every one there. Then with a low ejaculation of delight, I rushed into the aviary. Nina had gone into the little parlor. I followed, in high glee, and catching her in my arms, astonished her by a hearty embrace.

She drew back, blushing and laughing.

"Why Philip, what ails you? You are quite crazed, I think."

"Just that, my Nina, my oleander, my nightingale; crazed with joy."

"You have found that unknown object which is to make you independent," cried she, as eagerly.

"Something almost as wonderful, dearest. Do you know that Madame Armstrong has gone to the fete arrayed in velvet and diamonds, bedizened like any princess?"

"Why yes. She is fond of a showy costume. I knew that long ago."

"But did you know that your money bought the rich robes, and fitted out the fine equipage, and procured the jewels?"

"Now you are really crazed, Philip."

"Not at all, thou precious little snowdrop, which art no whit fairer or sweeter for this golden setting. I have found out the secret; I have solved the riddle; I have compelled the Sphinx to speak! Madame Armstrong learned of the great fortune waiting for the heirs of one Harley L'Estrange, and quietly set to work to find her long-ago discarded sister's child. She hunted you up, kept you as an object of charity, and quietly fitted out an establishment suitable to your fortune. Everything is explained now—your seclusion, her munificence, and the strict guard kept over your movements. The woman's boldness is wonderful, her artfulness something marvellous; but she has made one fatal mistake—in introducing a drawing-master."

Nina was trembling violently.

"Do not deceive me, Philip," faltered she.

"My innocent unsophisticated lamb, not for the world, would I cheat you so cruelly! See, here are the proofs. Behold for yourself how innocently you have walked into that crafty woman's trap. It is your fortune she is spending so lavishly. How generous in her to protect her poor relatives!"

Nina went over the papers, with my help, and was at length convinced of the monstrous wrong inflicted upon her. After that, we sat an hour, in such delicious talk, such golden castle-building! I did not wrong my manliness so much as to impute to myself a mercenary spirit, when I exulted at having won her. What was her fortune, in comparison to Nina herself? And had I not wooed her when I believed her obscure and penniless?

It was like a fairy dream to the guileless creature, and I could not wonder at her agitation. We had agreed to return the case, and conceal our discovery, until I had obtained the proper legal advice concerning

the affair, when I was to come boldly, and bring a suitable protector for my betrothed bride.

"Ah," said I, as I toyed with the golden curls that rippled against my shoulder, "can you imagine Madame Armstrong's look of consternation—she who has hitherto known only triumph? She has checkmated me on my own game; but I can forgive her, in consideration of this defeat."

I had been caressingly stroking the sunny silken tresses.

"O Nina, what incomparable hair! I think there are myriad fireflies tangled in its curling meshes. Do you know it was the first thing to catch my eye when I was introduced into your presence, in the conservatory boudoir? I could only compare it to an aureole around the head of some of the old painters' Madonnas. It is the most superb hair I ever saw. Do you know how I admire it?"

She laughed merrily, while I playfully shook out the lovely tresses.

"Unbind the ribbon," pleaded I; "let me see it perfectly free."

Her white fingers promptly obeyed. The ribbon fell down into her lap, the soft flow of bronzed gold swayed like a sunset cloud, around her shoulders.

"It is a pity to wear even a ribbon," I said.

"Madame Armstrong insists upon it. She ties up my hair every morning, with her own hands. It is another of her mysterious movements. One would make sure she was very fond of me, and proud of my hair. She forbids me to change the ribbon till she herself brings another. I remember how vexed she was, once, because I took it off."

"That is odd," said I, carelessly; "but her taste is certainly unexceptionable. I have always admired the daintiness of the ribbon. This is a bee; the other day it was a golden butterfly, embroidered on its silken texture."

I took the ribbon in my fingers heedlessly. It was a somewhat peculiar contrivance. A thick broad band of silk, something the color of her hair, with a loop in either end, passed under the shining cloud of curls, and the ribbon was drawn through the loops and knotted on the outside.

"I have sometimes suspected there was some spell connected with that band," continued Nina, "my aunt is so watchful over it."

I interrupted her with a great shout,

while I seized the band and examined it closely.

"Eureka!" cried I, hunting up my pen-knife, and running its sharp blade carefully beneath the silk. I scarcely needed the proof of sight. I was convinced I had found the mysterious hiding-place of those precious long-sought papers.

I caught Nina again in my arms, as they fell out from their oiled-silk covering, the broad red seals uppermost.

"Nina, Nina," cried I, in tumultuous happiness, "I have beaten in both games! O, that golden hair of yours! No wonder it gave me such a magnetic thrill when my eyes first glanced upon it. Poor Madame Armstrong! she has just lost her castle, and now here is checkmate to her queen, and the poor knight is swept off the board."

Well, what need of further description? The dullest imagination can picture it. Of course I rushed away to my uncle's, and, not daring to leave my Nina to the mercy or fury of the "Jezebel" he had anathematized so often, I took her with me, and sent for my mother to come and take the

trembling little dove under her wing.

There was a painful and somewhat ludicrous scene that next day, in Madame Armstrong's elegant drawing-room; but I must confess she abdicated with dignity, and covered over her rage and mortification with a fortitude worthy of a better cause. Nina was anxious to spare a public exposure, and so madame and her son were allowed to depart in peace, having disgorged as much of their ill-gotten spoil as we cared to insist upon. We heard no more of them, although the small annuity which my Nina generously allowed to them is regularly forwarded, and called for at Paris.

It will hardly sound well for me to describe the sensation it created when I appeared with my lovely young bride, nor to declare how efficient an officer I proved, at the post my uncle proudly declared was the most thoroughly-earned of any under her majesty's government. But this much I may be allowed to state, that we were very happy and very fortunate in our future relations, and that to this day I am as proud as ever of Nina's curls!

## NOT LIGHTLY LOVED.

BY MISS ADA CAMBRIDGE.

Madge Burton's face is aglow. Somebody for whom she has been watching with wistfully hopeful eyes is by her side at last; somebody whose presence brings her no little pleasure has her hand in his, while he murmurs a few very ordinary speeches in her ear.

A gay, pretty scene the ball-room at the Chase presents. The dainty dresses of the ladies, the entrancing strains of music, the perfume of the flowers, the brilliant light falling upon all, cause Guy Dysart to draw a long breath of pleasure as he leads Madge Burton, his partner for the next waltz, forward. He throws critical glances at the fair faces near him, satisfies himself that none are to be compared with the one into which a moment since he looked so fervently, and then gives himself up to the exquisite pleasure of the present.

But in a little while Madge's steps flag; Guy notices the tired look that creeps into the bonny brown eyes, and whispers gently, —

"You are weary. The room is very hot. Let me take you outside."

After the garish, artificial light of the ball-room, the quiet, subdued beams which the moon flings profusely on the earth are pleasant. Madge feels rested at once as the wind plays amid her curls. She glances at the blue-black sky, so grandly lighted with the tapers of heaven, and thrills with the

tumultuous joy that rarely moves souls who have left youth behind them. Guy catches the involuntary happy sigh, and, scanning her face anxiously, is rewarded for his trouble by a vision of dowy, lustrous eyes, flexible, purposeful lips, and serene, steady brow. Very beautiful he thinks her, though in truth she possesses none of the rare loveliness of which poets rave. She is just a pure, pretty maiden, her greatest charm her unsophisticated innocence; but Guy loves her, and dowers her with all the charms which the fair daughters of Eve claim.

The brown, manly face is inclined toward Madge as she stands with the wind swelling round her, looking abstractedly at the gleaming gems above her. The gray eyes, just now unusually tender, are full of character and brightness; the short upper lip closing on the nether one forms a decisive, strengthful mouth; the massive square brow betokens intelligence of a high order. He is well-favored, is this lover of Madge.

Madge — she is only a shy country girl — thinks it would be difficult to find Guy's equal. He is her Bayard, her knight *sans peur et sans reproche*. Only a few weeks have passed since first her eyes lighted upon him; but she loves him already, and loves with this girl is a real, living, ennobling passion.

"You will be going home soon?" Guy

says presently; for Madge Burton is only visiting some friends who have taken compassion on her somewhat dull life, and have brought her to taste the rather feverish gayeties which form so large a portion of their existence.

"Yes," Madge answers, with a regretful intonation. "I go back this week."

The Burtons of Craysfell are of good and ancient family. They have held a position in the country almost second to none. It is said, and not without cause, that, some centuries ago, a Burton, on being offered a title of dignity, refused it with something like scorn; he counting the simple, unprefixed name which his ancestors had borne so bravely, of greater value and significance than any other bestowed, though such might be given as a mark of esteem and honor. Of late years, the Burtons had ceased to take a prominent part in the doings of the busy world. Archibald Burton, Madge's father, had lived for many years a life of retirement and seclusion, which, so it is whispered, has not been causeless.

Madge is the light of her home; her father almost worships her, and she loves him very dearly. *If she sometimes finds her days dull and wearisome, she suffers uncomplainingly, remembering that her father had endured heavy burdens, burdens which she thinks at times have not ceased to exist when she looks at his furrowed brow and troubled face.*

That her brother is the cause of the hopeless despairing pain that she reads in her father's eyes she cannot doubt. What has he done that his name should never be uttered but with bated breath, that he should be banished from his home? He is many years older than she is. She can only just remember him. It is so long since she last saw him. Many times she has tried to question her father about him, but he has always evaded her queries; and, indeed, had he not done so, the intense anguish which it is evident her words have never failed to bring him would have silenced her.

But tonight she does not think of this; her past life lies in the background. She is happy with Guy, — joyously and unthinkingly happy, even as a child might be.

They walk about the grounds slowly. Guy talks a little, but it is very doubtful whether Madge hears him. She is musing over trivial incidents which have brightened her life of late. Guy watches her, and is

filled with deep emotion. "If she can only love me," he thinks to himself, — "if she will only be my wife! Surely my mother will welcome her as a daughter? For she will not be portionless; though, were she, I would strive to win her just as earnestly, Heaven knows, and give up her foolish craze about Cecil and me."

The night-air is too warm to be hurtful, but Guy is very careful of Madge. He persuades her to wrap her cloak round her; and she, though she laughs at him rather willfully, finds his anxiety passing sweet. They have wandered from the vicinity of the house, and are standing among the flowers. The odor is delightful; Madge cries out with pleasure, and Guy smiles at her rapture.

"I shall miss it all so," she says sorrowfully. "It has been like a bright, beautiful dream;" and she turns her face with its sweet sadness toward him.

His breath came thick and hot; he longs to utter words which shall tell her how greatly he loves her, but he overcomes his desire. He will see her father before he disturbs her innocent composure. He bends forward, and gathers a rich red rose.

"Will you wear it?" he asks, "taking it as an omen that you are as yet only on the threshold of something better than a beautiful dream, a beautiful life?"

She accepts the flower, and for a moment her fingers twine round it lovingly; then she fastens it in her dress, and without more words they leave the pensive, silvery night to mingle with the dancers.

## CHAPTER II.

The absence of Madge and Guy from the ball-room had not been unnoticed. Lydia Dysart's sharp eyes discover it almost immediately; and, though a little pang of discomfited vanity troubles her when she finds with whom Guy has wandered out-of-doors, she is not on the whole ill-pleased. Lydia knows right well that her aunt intends that she shall marry her cousin Guy, and, weak-minded, yielding damsel that she is, fears she shall not have strength effectually to resist, if Guy adds his importunities to his mother's. She is very fond of Guy, she continually assures herself; but it is as a cousin, not as anything nearer. Her husband? Gay, heedless Lydia almost shudders at the thought! Light-hearted George



Waite is far more to her taste; but then handsome easy George is poor, and there seems no chance of his ever being extricated from the morass of debts with which he has to struggle; no chance, unless—Lydia shrugs her shoulders gleefully at this fancy—she presents him with her hand and wealth.

Tonight, Lydia has had little opportunity of exchanging words with Mr. Waite, who is present. Her aunt, save when she has been dancing, has kept her close by her side. But fortune favors the brave. Mr. Waite, finding Lydia seated quietly outside the charmed circle, asks permission, and carries her off. Nothing loath is Lydia to find herself moving to the pleasant strains of music. She is too glad to talk much; but George is not content to be silent.

"Lydia," he says reproachfully, "you have been avoiding me tonight."

"Avoiding you? O George!"

"I have not spoken two dozen words with you, and you seemed almost unwilling to give me this waitz."

"George, George, why will you not understand? If I was to let aunt see that—that—well, you know what I mean—I believe she would insist on my marrying Guy off-hand."

The pretty face, covered with hot blushes, looks lovely. George drops his voice to a lower key.

"You will marry Guy, I suppose?" he says, with assumed carelessness, unprepared for the indignant, angry look that Lydia turns upon him.

"I dare say I shall," she says impetuously, but with such a grieved lip that George repents his hasty words.

"I beg your pardon, Lydia; but it is enough to make a man mad. I love you, and yet I dare not tell you so."

"You do tell me," Lydia says saucily; and then her gayety fades as she looks into his blue eyes. "What will be the end of it all, George?"

They are in the conservatory now, for, though the waltz is over, George is not disposed to bring his *tete a tete* with Lydia to a hurried conclusion. The words smite him harshly. He draws Lydia nearer to him.

"What is it you fear?" he asks, adding gloomily, "I wonder if you really care for me?"

Lydia stands still a moment, pondering; then a rush of feeling overcomes her. Nat-

urally thoughtless, she has not, until this moment, sounded her own feelings.

"George, I do," she answers gravely, but with such curiously intense emotion that he feels constrained to say humbly,—

"I am not worthy of you, dear, but I love you."

She whispers something in reply as she puts her hand in his. Whatever her words are, that they please him well is evident as they stand silently together, gravely happy.

"Guy is a good fellow," George Waite remarks at last, with a little complaisance.

"He is, indeed. I hope Madge Burton will make him happy, for it is plain he cares for her."

"Madge Burton? Lydia, what are you talking about?"

George's face is scared,—his eyes have a bewildered light in them. Lydia wonders at this.

"I was speaking of Miss Burton," she tells him. "Perhaps I ought not to have done so; but it is very clear that Guy cares for her, and truly she is so sweet and good that I do not wonder at what I heard some one call his infatuation."

Lydia pauses. George cries out almost hoarsely,—

"She is a daughter of Burton of Cray-fell!"

"Yes; but, George, what is the matter with you?"

For a moment George Waite does not answer; then he says soberly,—

"They cannot care much for each other,—they were strangers a few weeks since."

"George, love takes no heed of time. I think Guy is devoted to her."

"Then there is terrible heartache for him in the future."

"George, George, what do you know about her?"

"Her brother is a"—

But the last word is inaudible. It has to be repeated ere Lydia comprehends it; and then her face reflects her lover's pallor.

### CHAPTER III.

Madge is tired. A partly thoughtful, partly weary, look has stolen into her eyes. She is to return home on the morrow, and for the first time in her life the fact brings her regret. Her heart is full of a vague uneasiness. Will the happiness that she has enjoyed of late be terminated now? she

wonders, and, wondering, gazes sorrowfully at the silvery shade beneath the beech-tree. Her head is aching, her face is dismal, the curves round her mouth are sad. She is abandoning herself to the luxury of pensive meditation; and yet beneath her hardly painful sorrow is the very powerful consolation of Guy's words and looks when last they met.

She thinks of the old home, of her father, and smiles, remembering how once she fancied that all her life would be spent at Craysfell. Now she hopes otherwise, and, ah! the hope changes into bliss as Guy walks toward her! He is carrying his fishing-rod; but he throws it upon the grass as she springs up, flushed and disturbed, at his greeting.

He is not vexed that his morning's sport is interrupted. After all, it is pleasanter to saunter by Madge's side through the long grass, under the shadow of the trees, than to lie idly in the sunlight making a pretence of fishing, — for only a pretence such work would be likely to prove, when thoughts — happy, joyous thoughts — of his Madge were chasing each other through his brain.

In what is this girl by his side different from all other girls? Guy has flirted with not a few maidens in possession of youth and beauty, but none of those in whose society he has so pleasantly destroyed time and baneful ennui have enthralled him as this charming child Madge has done. She has thrown a spell over him, causing him to despise the indolence which has helped to fritter away his days hitherto. He longs, like the men of old, to do noble deeds for his lady's sake, longs to prove that he is worthy of winning her. Curious, strange fancies render him restless, but Madge guesses nothing of this as she listens to him with reverence and pleasure.

Their words are very innocent; of love-making they must be held guiltless, — that is, if love is to be signified only by words; but, if silences can interpret this disturbing emotion, then indeed Guy's eyes and Madge's shy glances send the scale down heavily against them.

Madge forgets that tomorrow will end the present pleasant life. Without reserve she flings herself into the joy of today, and is happy.

They talk of her home at last. Madge's words flow freely about her father, but, when Guy asks her about her brother, an

observable hesitancy creeps into her speech. "He is away from home," she says reluctantly. "I have not seen him for many years."

It is impossible that Guy can fail to see the shade that flickers over her face as she speaks; yet he continues the subject somewhat curiously.

"He is traveling, I suppose?"

"I — I think so." Then as Guy looks surprised at her answer, she says quickly, "I know so little about him. I am afraid he has been rather wild; papa never speaks of him."

"That is strange," Guy comments, so absently that Madge's color comes hotly, and for a few minutes there is total silence between them.

Then Guy asks for a description of Craysfell, and Madge gives him such a rapturous account of the purple moorlands and grand everlasting hills, so familiar to her, that his face lightens as he listens.

"I shall like to see your home," he says thoughtfully; and Madge's face becomes crimson as he emphasizes the "shall."

"Papa would be pleased to see you," she remarks simply, looking straight before her at the billowy waving grass.

"Do you think so?" Guy asks meaningly. "I am coming to Craysfell to prefer a request that will gauge his pleasure."

Madge instinctively understands him; but, if she has any doubt as to his meaning, the hand laid lightly upon hers effectually dispels it.

"Madge, shall I come or not?" he says, wistfully regarding her averted face; and Madge answers, with a tremble in her voice, "Come."

#### CHAPTER IV.

A couple of portmanteaus, packed and locked, and blocking up the doorway of Guy Dysart's dressing room. A quantity of miscellaneous articles are littering the chairs. The appearance of the chamber is the reverse of pleasing; yet Guy throws a glance of approval round him as he exclaims, —

"Off at last! Tomorrow I shall see her, my Madge! I wonder if she has been longing anxiously to see me as I have been to see her."

A week has elapsed since Madge Burton's return to Craysfell, but many things have served to prevent Guy's following her so

speedily as he desired. He has had a very fierce battle to fight with his mother. Mrs. Dysart has rebelled bitterly against her son's choice of a bride. For many years she has looked on her niece Lydia as Guy's future wife. What could be more desirable than that the estates Lydia has inherited from her mother should be linked with those belonging to the Dysart's, lying, as they did, in such close proximity to each other? To give up her long-cherished project was terribly hard, and for a time Guy despaired of wringing even the most reluctant consent from his mother; but, with unconcealed chagrin, she at last swallowed the nauseous pill, and with an ill grace gave Guy her permission, should he obtain the answer he craved, to bid Madge welcome in her name.

Lydia knows nothing about Guy's desires yet, — she is from home; and Mrs. Dysart, blindly hoping that Madge will refuse her son, keeps the matter from her.

"Well, Peter," Guy says, turning to the servant who has entered, "what is it?"

"Mr. Waite wishes to see you, sir, on important business."

"Forgive me if I am intruding," George Waite interrupts, — he has followed the man closely, — "but indeed I have urgent reasons for seeing you."

The men shake hands heartily. Guy is glad of the sight of a friendly face; he needs some one to while away the time. But, when the door closes, George's eyes, falling on the preparations for departure, cloud. He bites his lip nervously; but Guy, full of happy thoughts, is unobservant, and fails to notice the agitated, abstracted expression of his face.

"Wish me luck!" Guy cries. George, old friend, I am off tomorrow to ask one of the dearest little girls in Christendom to become my wife!"

Guy Dysart and George Waite are friends of too long standing for any reserve to lie between them. Guy expects hearty congratulations from his comrade, and faces round to receive them; but something in George's face startles him and causes a sensation of dismay to shoot through him.

"What ails you, man?" he cries impatiently. "One would think, to judge by your face, that I had stolen your love from you; but that can hardly be."

"Hush, Guy!" said George Waite. "It is Miss Burton to whom you are alluding, is it not?"

"Ay. What have you to say against her?"

"Against her? Nothing. I believe she is all you deem her, and that is saying not a little; but she can never be your wife, Guy."

"Never be my wife? Are you mad?"

George shakes his head sadly.

"I am sane enough; but you have used the word I have shrunk from uttering. Robert Burton — Miss Burton's brother — is hopelessly insane; her mother died raving mad!"

Painfully the words ring in Guy's ears. White, livid to the very lips, he turns. A film obscures his sight, he utters a moan like unto the cry of a tortured animal. George is silent from sheer distress.

"O Madge, Madge!" Then the stricken face, the fevered eyes, are raised imploringly. "Surely you are mistaken? Surely that terrible curse does not rest on my darling?"

"If I did not know that that which I have told you is but too terribly correct, do you think I should have pained you thus. My sister was engaged to Robert Burton; but, thank Heaven, before that engagement terminated in marriage, we learned what fatal evil rested on him, — learned that in his mother's family madness was hereditary, — and saved her from the agonizing fate of becoming a maniac's wife. With the ruptured engagement our friendship and acquaintance with the Burtons closed. My father always deemed that Squire Burton acted unfairly in this matter, in keeping the danger that menaced his son a secret from us."

Guy listens in a dull, uncomprehending way. Every word George utters falls on his burning brain with a weighty power; and, when he ceases, he is forced to cry out, with a mighty, intolerable pain, —

"O just Heaven, must we part?"

George is very pitiful; tender as a woman, he feels for his friend when he reads the anguish written in every line of his face; yet he cannot gainsay the words that escape Guy. He and Madge must part, and it will be better if the parting is quickly got over.

"She does not know of the blight upon her, — and I dare not tell her! Ah, why are these things permitted?"

He forgets his friend's presence, forgets everything save the intense agony that racks him in every limb, and cries out as strong

passionate souls will when the Infinite Power teaches them their weakness.

It was a fearful hour, such as few pass through, almost beyond the limits of Guy's endurance.

"If she had been unworthy, if she had died, I could have borne it. But it is not I only who will suffer. She loves,—I have won her affection; and now how can I bear that she shall think me unworthy?"

"Unworthy?"

"Ay,—I shall never see her again! She will watch and wait for my coming, and, watching and waiting in vain, will think I have mocked her love and laughed at her passion. Madge, my darling!"

A hard knot gathers in George Waite's throat. He thinks of his Lydia, thinks of the days that he hopes he will yet spend with her, and sincerely indeed does he pity his friend.

"What do you intend to do?" he ventures at last.

"I shall go abroad at once. Perhaps amid fresh scenes I may learn to forget her bonny face; perhaps I shall find life less unendurable away from all that reminds me of her; and yet I know I shall never put her from my heart while I exist, for my love is no light thing."

It is late when George Waite leaves Guy Dysart; but, late though it is, morning dawns before Guy rouses himself from the heavy stupor that has come over him. Haggard and pallid, he rises with a heavy sigh, and flings open the window. The fresh morning air rushes in and cools his heated brow; he gazes with longing, despairing eyes at the green hills and almost colorless sky; and then over him like a whirlwind passes resistless stirring thoughts.

"Oh, Heaven, give me to bear all that I am able," he cries, raising his eyes to the morning sky, "but spare her,—let the anguish of pain rest on her lightly!"

## CHAPTER V.

Lydia Waite—George has won his wife—is staying with her husband in Scotland. She is standing on a hilly elevation, watching the sunset in all its marvellous glory. There is a wide rugged beauty around her that touches her so keenly that her lips part with a breath of intense feeling, as she recognizes the sublime grandeur under the shadow of which she feels both

poor and feeble. Her gray eyes look black; they are full of deep, serious thoughts, such as hitherto have little troubled her.

The honeymoon is over, but Lydia prefers putting up with the inconveniences of her husband's shooting-box to being separated from him. She wonders how she would have managed to get through her days had he left her behind him, since, as things are, she finds the hours during which he is absent from her sufficiently heavy.

The evenings close in early. Lydia finds the wind unpleasantly chilly tonight, and turns from feasting her eyes on the beauty around her, to hasten to the snug little home-nest she has made for herself in this solitary place. Her feet move anything but tardily; yet, when she catches sight of her husband, waiting for her, she increases her speed almost to a run.

"George," she pants, as he puts his arm round her, "you are home early."

He nods affirmatively as they enter the house. Lydia throws off her hat and cloak, and looks out of the window. The sky is thick with clouds threatening a heavy storm. There is a sweet sense of security by one's own fireside. Lydia feels this, as, a little later, she challenges George to a game of chess.

How quiet the room grows! Lydia's curls are falling over her face, which is flushed and excited. George smiles as he notices the gleam in her eyes and the rosy tint on her cheeks, and thinks, with a little exultation, how fortunate he has been in winning her. Presently the game comes to an end. Lydia looks at George meditatively.

"Well," he says interrogatively and merrily.

"I was thinking of Guy," Lydia answers. "Poor fellow!"

George echoes her words, and his mouth straightens into a grave line.

"The fortunes of men are very unequal. Guy deserves a better fate than I, and yet I have a bonny wife, and he—well, I expect his life will be a lonely one."

"Don't disparage yourself," Lydia says, nestling closely to him: for she is a loving, clinging woman, not at all inclined to do without the manifestations of affection.

"Hark to the wind! How it is rising!"

"Listen, Lydia!" George exclaims hastily. "Is not that the bark of a dog?"

Lydia listens attentively, and amid the

noise of the wind catches a shrill bark, as of a dog in distress.

"Yes, George," she answers. "But what does it mean?"

"There is something wrong, I fear, — an accident probably; but I shall soon know."

Putting on his overcoat quickly, George calls his gamekeeper, and the men sally out. Lydia watches them till they are out of sight.

Following the sounds that meet them, they push on hastily. Suddenly the report of a gun startles them; there is a sharp, short cry, an exclamation of horror follows, and then silence ensues.

"Good Heaven! what is it?" George cries frenziedly, recoiling as he comes in contact with a thick-set, vigorous-looking man.

There is no need to complain of darkness now. George and Timon have pushed their way into the midst of a group of men who are making the night light by means of the lanterns they hold. A thrill runs through George, as he catches sight of the object on which the rays from the lanterns are falling. Two men are bending over a prostrate figure, and — yes, surely there is a crimson stain dying the heather!

At the sound of George's voice the men turn quickly; something very like relief passes over their faces as they behold the new-comers. One of the men steps forward.

"He is dangerously wounded," he says, pointing to the still and apparently lifeless figure. "Can you tell us which is the nearest house to which we can take him?"

"You must bring him to my place; it is close at hand. But I don't understand how this has happened. Who are you?"

"The keepers of the Reston Asylum. This man escaped from us two days since. He was in a dangerous condition then; but, when we found him just now, he was simply desperate. We fired in self-defence, for he had a pistol with which he would have done no little mischief had we not taken the power from him."

George looks pitifully at the wounded, helpless man; then he turns to Timon, and bids him hasten home and prepare his mistress for the burden they are about to bring her; after which he assists the men to make a rude kind of litter.

Lydia bravely overcomes the agitation Timon's story causes her. She and her

maid work industriously and assiduously in turning the parlor into a bedchamber, but the work is scarcely finished when George arrives. His face is pallid; the scene he has so lately witnessed has tried him severely.

"My dear, they are bringing him," he whispers gently; "come away."

He takes her up-stairs and there leaves her. Lydia thinks he is absent an unnecessarily long time, and, when she hears his soft footfall, moves to the door. His face — before pale and disturbed — is now quivering and ghastly. Lydia, looking into it, trembles. George clasps her tenderly, and then murmurs with emotion, —

"The man down-stairs is Robert Burton. Lydia, he is dying!"

## CHAPTER VI.

Sanct! The terrible mist, the awful darkness, that has so long enveloped the once thinking, reasoning brain, is now lifted; the burning torment of madness, that has so long stretched him on the rack of suffering, is now over. Weak as a new-born babe, helpless as the feeblest child, Robert Burton lies, no longer a maniac from whom the kindest turn fearfully, but a man claiming the divine power of reason. He is dying; but Heaven has given him in his death that which has been so long withheld, and the last hours of his existence are very blessed.

His gratitude for the loving tendance Lydia gives him pains her inexpressibly. All she can do for him is so trifling in her eyes, since she cannot prolong his life one hour; and yet for the cup of cooling drink she holds to his parched lips, for the gentle hand that smooths his pillow or rests on his damp brow, his thanks are unutterably touching. When she catches the wiseful gleam in his eyes, as she tells him that his father and sister will soon be with him, the choking sensation in her throat all but strangles her.

The meeting between Robert Burton and his father is very pitiful. The strong old man is bowed with passionate grief. His son, so lost to him, is given back to him but to die. Looking into the thin face and on the attenuated form, no wonder he breaks forth into a lamentable wailing cry, —

"O my son, my son!"

"Father, all things are wisely ordered. I am clothed and in my right mind now; perhaps if length of years were given to me, my reason would again forsake me."

A shiver escapes him, as he remembers the chaos of the past. A sad wreck his life has been, but the sunlight is softening its close.

"And this is Madge," he murmurs as the girl bends over him and touches his lips with her soft ones, — "little Madge, my sister!"

He holds her from him feebly, and looks at her so wistfully, that the hot tears roll thick and fast down her cheeks. Then he whispers, —

"Kiss me again, little sister, and I will carry the kiss to your mother in heaven."

She does his bidding, but oh! the sobs that break from her! It is so hard to watch him suffering uncomplainingly, so hard to know that the end is at hand.

"Is your face always so sorrowful, Madge, as it is now?" he asks after a while, and Madge crimsones painfully at the question; for, indeed, her face is strangely still and grave for one so young. Something in the droop of the girl's head, in the quiver of her lips, tells him that he is in dangerous waters, and he steers cleverly from them.

George comes into the room by and by, and Madge avails herself of the opportunity to leave her brother.

George talks of many things, — things connected with the life of today, with which Robert will so soon have done; presently he speaks a word of sincere regret for Robert's rapidly failing strength, but the sick man interrupts him: —

"It is better as it is," he tells him. "The curse which has so terribly embittered my father's life will soon be removed. Waite, I see how fearfully I should have wronged your sister had I married her. A happy wife, now, she will rejoice that there was light with me at last."

"Yes," George answers briefly; then he says hesitatingly, "Your sister Madge will never marry."

"Will she not? I trust she may; she is hardly fitted to buffet with the contrary winds of life alone."

Thoroughly astonished, George shows his surprise so unmistakably that Robert exclaims, —

"Surely you are not thinking that the

curse that has been my bane is Madge's also? My mother was not hers!"

Surprise, amazement and gladness shine visibly in George's face as he cries, —

"Can this be true?"

"Indeed it is. My father was twice married. Madge's mother was our curate's daughter."

"Then there is no insanity in her blood?"

"Thank Heaven, no! Have you been thinking so?"

"I have; and some one to whom she is very dear has been laboring under the same mistake."

"And for that some one she cares?"

"I don't know; but, ah! all will be well now!"

A smile of singular sweetness and peace crosses the dying man's lips as George speaks. In another moment he has closed his eyes in sleep.

The end comes quietly. Just as the night and morning meet, Robert Burton's soul leaves its earthly tenement, with which it has so long been encumbered. A happy light is on his face when Madge looks on it; and though her eyes are heavy with weeping, through her sorrow runs the simple thought, —

"He would not return to us if he could."

George Waite is very pre-occupied. Robert Burton's words respecting Madge have disturbed him excessively. He will wait, however, until the funeral is over, before communicating with Guy. He watches Madge unceasingly. Lydia observes this, and asks, —

"Are you thinking what a dear wife Madge would have made Guy, had a marriage between them been possible? I often find myself dreaming of them, and wishing we could make them happy."

"We may help to do so," George says gently. "We may yet see them man and wife."

Lydia does not respond; she is surprised at his remark. George whispers as he kisses her, —

"Though into each life some rain must fall, all days need not be dark and dreary!"

## CHAPTER VII.

Madge returned home full of gladness. It was pleasant once more to look into her

father's face, pleasant to watch his eyes brighten as she wandered through the familiar grounds, talking of all that had happened to her during her absence. The first week slipped quickly by. She hardly wanted Guy yet; her joy was so new and strange that she could hardly grasp it. But when to the first seven days a few more had been added, she began to look forward for his coming, at first confidently, then with a painful, *anxious doubt*. A hungry light crept into her eyes at this time, a light that burned sadly when the roses in her cheeks had changed to pallor. What could be keeping Guy from Craysfell? she asked herself again and again, with a chafed sense of humiliation. Slowly the fear awoke in her heart that that which had been so terribly earnest a matter to her had been but play to him. Guy had been indulging in a flirtation with her, and had never given her a serious thought.

It was just as well Madge believed this; for it helped her wonderfully through the trouble which threatened to crush her youth and vigor. Underlying Madge's gentle, shy manner, and sweet, sober face, was a brave womanhood. If the long quiet nights could have told tales of sorrowful weeping and bitter pain, they could also have whispered of the courageous spirit that strove against the complaints of her feebler nature. Squire Burton never guessed the secret of her grave face and quiet bearing. He missed the merry songs and tuneful laugh, with which Madge had once made her home resound; but he thought this was owing to the natural change which comes over the spirit when maidenhood is slipping past. The old endearing ways, the loving forethought, were in no wise changed. Madge was a companion now where she had formerly been a pet. The Squire wondered sometimes how he had done without her clear reasoning brain, wondered whence she had gathered the wisdom which was at once deep and simple; and, while he wondered, a disagreeable fear would torment him when he remembered that he could not reasonably expect to keep this wisdom and sweetness to himself for long.

Very evenly flowed the daily round of Madge's life, until there came the woful tidings that her brother was dying. A dark time of trial would that ever be to look back upon, but it taught Madge that there was work yet for her to do, with which no

other hand could meddle. When she saw her father's stricken white face, she knew that while he lived she must be his comforter. Looking on the grave where her brother rested, she lifted the yoke that sometimes cut desperately into her delicate flesh, and strove mightily to overcome her love for Guy, — strove, but succeeded with very questionable success.

All that time of wearing perplexity and pain is in the past now; and yet Madge's eyes wander from the bills she was examining this morning as thoughts of the few brief weeks of happiness she once enjoyed revisit her. Presently she stands by while her maid, busy with her wardrobe, discusses the use of the white silk dress, old-fashioned now, which she wore — it seems so long ago — at the ball at the Chase.

Price handles the dress carelessly, and talks of it disparagingly, but Madge hardly heeds her. She touches it reverently, with a sad kind of pity for herself, such as she might have felt had she been looking on her own dead face; and, when it is folded and laid away, she finds that her old pain has been re-awakened, feels the throbbing and aching which she had once thought stilled.

There is one thin line on Madge's brow, which, today, is startlingly distinct. Squire Burton's eyes rest on it with a little pain, as he pulls a chair near his daughter, and, lifting her hands from the paper where they had been lying, folds them in his own.

Madge's cheeks color under his scrutiny; she feels there is something unwonted in her father's behaviour.

"My dear," he says gently, looking long and lovingly into the fair face, "I have had cause to thank heaven today because of Robert."

She looks at him wonderingly.

"He is happy," is all she answers.

"Yes; and for the first time I perfectly comprehend how impossible it would ever have been during life to have applied that word to him. I have just been listening to the story of a mistake, Madge."

"Yes," she says absently, fitfully debating with herself whether her hair will ever be iron-gray like her father's, or snow-white.

The Squire sees that her thoughts are wandering; but he suddenly speaks so impressively that her attention is arrested.

"My marriage with your mother, Madge, was a private one. I had lived so long out of the world that I did not care to form in any way the subject of a nine-days' wonder. I sent no announcement to the newspapers, took no steps to make the matter public. Just one or two friends I told of the change in my life when I brought my wife home, and with that I was content. My first marriage had been an unhappy one in every sense; but your mother — O Madge! such sorrow as I have known could never trouble me through her. You were born, and I thanked Heaven for my daughter; when I held you in my arms, — thanked Heaven in some such way as your mother did when I held her, just before her death, for the last time."

Madge presses her father's hand fervently; and he, smiling at her abstractedly, falls into thought for a few minutes; then he rouses himself abruptly from his dream.

"Madge, did you care very much for the Mr. Dysart whom you met at the Chase?"

Madge shivers violently.

"Papa, papa!" she cries reproachfully.

"Child, I would not wound — I wish to heal. Look up! Mr. Dysart loves you!"

Madge stares dazedly at her father, who continues very softly, —

"He thought you and Robert were own sister and brother."

"Yes," she murmurs, not catching his meaning; but the Squire speaks again, this time very plainly.

"And, thinking this, he believed that the curse of insanity that was on him extended to you."

"O father!" she cries; and, though these are all the words she can find, her father comprehends the intensity of feeling beneath them, and kisses her very tenderly as he gives place to a younger man who has quietly entered the room.

## CHAPTER VIII.

"And so you have not been able to close your heart entirely against me, though you have tried sorely?" Guy whispers some time later, when Madge has scabbled out her joy and sorrow in his arms.

"O Guy, I have loved you through all!" she answers, with a respiration that tells its own story.

"Have you, my darling?"

"Yes," she responds heartily.

What happens during the pause that follows concerns only Guy and Madge. By and by she murmurs, —

"If what you believed had been true!"

Her words hurt him. Strong though he is, he cannot hide the shudder the bare thought causes him. He holds her very tightly to himself, but the lips that rest on her brow are fevered.

"Thank Heaven I was misled!" he cries passionately.

But Madge answers soberly, —

"Guy, I wish you had told me what you feared: I should not have suffered so then. It was the thought that you were false that brought me the worst pain."

"I could not tell you, dear, for I thought your father desired to keep you ignorant."

"You might have said that I had not been mistaken in thinking you loved me, but that, without fault on either side, we must forego all thoughts of happiness."

"But I did not know you loved me."

"O Guy! did you not?" she says shyly. I — I was afraid that I had let you see that too plainly, and that you despised me for it."

"Despised you!" he exclaims in his astonishment. "Madge, Madge! you little innocent heart."

His words are sweet as music to her; she drinks them in thirstily.

"Lydia is married," she remarks after a while. "O Guy, how I love her! She was so good to Robert."

"I know; that was a terrible time for you, darling."

Warm tears suffuse the bright eyes.

"But he is at peace now," she says.

"Ay, and the dread and anxiety concerning him which have made an old man of your father are over. O Madge! you will never understand what I experienced when George Waite told me that the misery and pain I had borne, thinking you could never be mine, were needless!"

"I think I can understand," Madge says softly; "but, after all, the pain may not have been quite useless."

"True; having so nearly lost my treasure, I shall now estimate her value aright. But, Madge," the young man continues, "have you heard how quickly Lydia's marriage was arranged?"

"No."

"Ah, it was all settled, consent wrung



from my mother, *trousseau* prepared, everything planned and carried out in a very few weeks! Madge, do you think you can make ready for me as speedily as Lydia did for George?"

"Guy, Guy!"

"Darling, let me hear that gladdest of all music, wedding-bells, will you?"

She does not answer; but the tuneful

peal to which Guy is desirous of listening salutes him ere long. The chimes ring out gayly, reverberatingly, when he and Madge become husband and wife.

And with the sound of the ringing bells commences the new life, which is running happily and joyously when the remembrance of those glad notes is but a far-off memory.

## OLD MOGGS.--A STORY OF CALIFORNIA LIFE.

BY JOHN CLERKE.

Old Moggs was dying: so his physicians said, so he believed, so his relatives hoped, — those relatives, I mean, who stood by his bedside to minister to his dying wants, and close his dying eyes. As for his son, poor boy, if he had any premonition of his father's approaching dissolution, I have no doubt he would have been profoundly grieved; but he was far away, and knew nothing about it.

Old Moggs was a long time in dying. Some people are so provokingly tenacious of life, when their dear relatives are altogether willing and ready to give them most respectful and respectable sepulture, and erect elegant monuments to their remains. I have known rich old uncles and aunts and grandfathers, and even fathers and mothers, to linger on and on, year after year, — and seeming to enjoy it too, — utterly regardless of the wishes and feelings of their needy and naturally exasperated heirs, who thought the old people should have been in their graves.

They have a custom among the Indians on the Oregon coast which I have thought might be introduced among Christians, to the great relief and advantage of heirs expectant, and those burdened with the support of infirm old parents and grandparents. Whenever one of these interesting "wards of the government" becomes so aged and infirm that he cannot spear a salmon, paddle a canoe, or gather wapatos and salaberries, his son or nephew or son-in-law, or whoever else chances to have the greatest interest in his welfare, leads him kindly forth to a retired spot on the beach, knocks him on the head with a club, and buries him in the sand; and thus the old party drops quietly out of existence, and there is no more mention of him.

You see for yourself the advantage of such a proceeding. It is quiet and inexpensive: no gathering of the *tillicums*, nor parade of canoes, nor beating of tomtoms, nor howling of hired squaws, nor decorating the grave with carved and painted images, and old cloths and canoes, and pots and pans and kettles with holes knocked through

them, that they may not tempt the cupidity of the living. All these ceremonies, which are *de rigueur* when a *sicash* is cut off in the prime and vigor of manhood, are very properly dispensed with in the case of one who perversely persists in living after his death becomes desirable. I respectfully suggest this subject for the consideration of the next Social-Science Congress.

But Moggs's tardiness in making his final exit (I use this phrase in preference to another because he had been an actor in his youth) was rather favorable than otherwise to the designs of his wife and her sister. They hoped, as I have said, that he was dying: nevertheless, they earnestly desired that he should not die until he had made a will, and one which should be in accordance with their wishes. They had not yet got him to consent to the execution of such a document: but they confidently expected to, and with some reason; for when two crafty and unscrupulous women get sole charge of an enfeebled, dying old man, they can usually mould him to their will.

Old Moggs was one of the largest proprietors and manager of the Blunderbore quartz mill and mine on Big-Bear canyon, two miles and five-eighths west-northwest of the flourishing town of Fossilburg. When he took the management of the property it was barely paying expenses; but under his squire and energetic management it soon began to yield fair dividends, and at length to return a very large income, so that it was considered the most valuable concern in that section of the State; and Moggs, as his income steadily and largely increased, began to be regarded as the most important man in Fossilburg, of which he was claimed as a citizen, although he spent most of his time at the mine and mill. When he first came to the Blunderbore he was a widower with one son, a sprightly lad of sixteen, whom he allowed to do pretty much as he pleased; — probably because he found that similar independence agreed very well with himself. He seemed to rejoice in his widowerhood, and to have no disposition to lay it aside, — even had the opportunities for so doing

been more plentiful and tempting than they were. But, truly, "man knoweth not his time."

About the time old Moggs took charge of the Biunderbore, the Mergles family, fresh from "the States," took the old wayside tavern, known as the "Travelers' Rest," in *Snail Hollow*, about half a dozen miles below Fossilburg, on the Sacramento road. The family consisted of Mr. Mergles, a meek and inoffensive elderly gentleman; Mrs. Mergles, an active, loud-voiced, bustling, boasting woman, who evidently wore the "unwhisperables;" Miss Sophronia Mergles, the elder daughter, who to years of discretion added all her mother's talent and energy; and Miss Euphemia Mergles, the youngest daughter, who, though but seventeen years of age, was declared by her mother and sister (and she did not attempt to deny it) to be a *marvel of feminine accomplishments*. She wrote such a beautiful hand! she had taken dancing lessons from a real French master! she could play the piano! she had studied French two quarters! Such a startling catalogue of gifts and graces might well be expected to strike consternation into the hearts of all spinsters in that wild mining region, and bring all eligible young men to her feet. Sophronia herself, though slightly *passee*, was conscious of a great degree of superiority. Indeed, the Mergleses had been "somebody" in their time, though now reduced to the necessity of serving scant fare with a profusion of gentility to such wayfarers as chance might direct to their place of entertainment. Mergles had been a justice of the peace in his former place of residence, and had even been "up for" the Legislature; and Mrs. Mergles confessed to a connection by marriage with a governor, and a judge, and a general of militia.

With these advantages and this prestige the Mergles girls could hardly fail to form excellent matrimonial alliances. There were only two difficulties in the way: handsome and really accomplished girls, though by no means plenty, were yet to be found in Fossilburg; and, while Sophronia Mergles was decidedly plain, Euphemia was as ugly as sin, — yes, as original sin. She had the features and complexion, and the form and stature, of a Chinawoman, and an uncommonly ill-favored one at that. The girls were, however, both of the gushing sort; and if either of them could get a young man

to look upon her without fear of sudden blindness, she would inevitably make some impression upon him. But, much to the surprise of their fond mother and themselves, it was long before they had an opportunity to employ their blandishments to any purpose.

At length, much to everybody's surprise, Sophronia succeeded in attracting the attention of old Moggs, and in due course of time, by dexterous management, married him. How she accomplished it, I do not pretend to know: I only state the fact. She was a very clever woman, and there was nothing but her plainness in the way of her ensnaring a much handsomer if not richer prize; for old Moggs was himself exceedingly plain, and his nose was ornamented with a very well developed rum-blossom. I suppose it was his own want of beauty that made him overlook his wife's personal defects. As for her, she cared nothing whatever for him, but a great deal for his money. That was her own declaration, as I have it from the most unquestionable authority. Mrs. Moggs made the remark to Mrs. Brown, who reported it to Mrs. Smith, who repeated it to Mrs. Jones, who related it to Mrs. Robinson, who told it to Mrs. Thompson, who confided it to her husband, who communicated it to me. That's pretty direct evidence, I take it. The person who would discredit that would demand corroboration of a French war telegram, or of Steamboat Davis's reports of Colorado explorations.

It was on his wedding night that old Moggs was smitten with the disease of which the physicians now said he was dying. They called it leprosy. He was swollen all over, and his skin was of a livid hue, while the natural uncomeliness of his features was very much heightened by their puffiness and strange discoloration. He was not, however, prostrated at once. He kept around on his feet in a slow, painful way for some time, and would not keep his bed until compelled to by the steady progress of the disease. There was a comfortable house adjoining the mill which he caused to be suitably furnished, and into it he removed with his wife and son. In justice to Mrs. Moggs, I must say that she nursed her invalid spouse with great care and attention, inasmuch that he regarded himself as exceedingly fortunate in having secured such a treasure, and he gradually yielded to the in-

fluence which she began insensibly to exert over him. It was not, however, until he became bedridden that she ventured to assert any positive authority. Then she began to persecute her step-son, Albert, in such a manner that the poor boy had not a moment's peace under his father's roof; and yet she did it in such a quiet way that when he went to lay his grievances before his father he was unable to specify an act of hers of sufficient gravity to warrant his complaint. By degrees she made his home so intolerable to him that Albert was constrained to leave it, and cast himself upon the mercy of the wide, wide world; which gave his stepmother an excellent opportunity to expatiate to her husband upon the ingratitude of that boy, whom she had taken as much pains to instruct, guide, and direct, and for whose comfort she had cared with as tender solicitude, as if he had been her own son. And old Moggs believed her. He thought that a woman who was so tenderly attentive to his wants would not neglect his offspring. Yet he did not harden his heart against Albert, who, I may as well record here as elsewhere, made his way to San Francisco, and, having inherited his father's histrionic propensities, joined a theatrical company, in which his native genius raised him to such distinction that he was soon intrusted with such *roles* as second soldier in tragedy, third villager in comedy, and fourth demon in spectacular pieces; in all of which he acquitted himself to his own satisfaction, and, so far as could be ascertained, to that of the public also.

Having got Albert out of the way, Mrs. Moggs's next step was to take Euphemia into her household, partly to assist her in nursing her husband, by which means she hoped to increase her own influence over him, and partly in order that, by virtue of the social position she had gained through her husband's wealth, she might further her sister's laudable desire to form a suitable matrimonial alliance. In her first object she seemed to succeed tolerably well. Euphemia played the part of nurse so well that old Moggs often expressed his sense of gratitude to her, and to his wife for enlisting her services. But her irretrievable ugliness, which no amount of dressing or jewelry could mitigate, was an almost insuperable obstacle in the way of the second scheme. No young man with the slightest appreciation of feminine beauty could be

induced to offer Miss Mergles any but the most ordinary attentions. At last, in sheer desperation, the two sisters, acting upon the adage that "half a loaf is better than no bread," concentrated their combined fascinations upon Samuel Pillkins, and after a series of remarkably skillful manoeuvres succeeded in attaching him to Miss Euphemia as her accepted lover.

Sam, of himself, was anything but a desirable match for even so neglected a damsel as Miss Mergles. He was unprepossessing in person, and trifling in character; and though he professed the law, he lacked both disposition and opportunity to practice it to any remunerative extent. But his father had money and property which would eventually descend to Sam; so that if present provision could be made for the young people they might marry at once, and safely trust to the future. Having resolved the matter in her mind, Mrs. Moggs — whose talent for diplomacy would have rendered her invaluable in a European court half a century ago — resolved to bring old Pillkins to a sense of his duty to give the young couple a fair start in life. She found him tolerably tractable; and when she represented to him that old Moggs, who was rapidly declining, and could not possibly last long, would undoubtedly remember Euphemia handsomely in his will, he assured her that he would do what was necessary on his part. He had a great deal of gallantry, with very little taste; and so long as Sam was satisfied with Euphemia he could see no objection to her.

Old Pillkins was a very energetic man, and pushed business in several different directions at the same time. Among other things, he was a partner with a young man named Robert Deveridge in a branch of the mining trade which involved the manufacture of hydraulic pipe, hose, and so forth, and dealing in force and lifting pumps, and other machinery. Deveridge managed the business, and kept the books, though Pillkins frequently collected outstanding accounts. He had originally gone into the business at Deveridge's solicitation, — the young man lacking capital to start it fairly himself, — and it had proven quite profitable. But Pillkins, although occasionally moved by generous impulses, was what business men call "tricky;" he would cheat his best friend, or his own brother, without the slightest compunction, and venture on

the very verge of criminality in order to obtain a pecuniary advantage. In casting about for an opening for Sam, it occurred to him that he might, by a little management, get rid of Deveridge at a cheap rate, and place his son in charge of the store and shop; and, having formed his plan of operation, he immediately set about its execution.

Giving out that he was going to San Francisco, he quietly made a tour through the upper mining towns and camps to which the trade of Pillkins & Deveridge extended, after which he actually visited San Francisco, and returned to Fossilburg after an absence of about three weeks. He met his partner with great cordiality, and for two or three days spent more time in the store than had been his wont, several times remaining in charge during Deveridge's temporary absence; the last time being late one evening, when his partner had, at his suggestion, gone to visit the superintendent of certain extensive hydraulic works, with the view of obtaining a contract for laying pipes. Early on the following morning Pillkins entered the store, and remarked carelessly, —

"Bob, suppose we look over the books, and see how this business is running. It seems to me that this concern has not been doing well of late. If any money has come in, I have not seen the color of it."

"It is the dull season now," replied Deveridge. "For several weeks I have taken in barely enough to pay expenses. But we shall do better next month. I have several large orders to fill, for which I expect cash. The books are here at the desk: look over them at your leisure."

On going to the desk, however, it was found that the cash-book and journal were missing. A strict search was instituted, in which Pillkins assisted with much apparent zeal; but they were not discovered. The men in the shop were questioned, but knew nothing of them; the boy who opened and swept the store and shop in the morning was summoned, but could give no account of them. Deveridge was troubled. Pillkins took up the ledger, and after examining it for a short time remarked, —

"I see you have not posted the books lately, Bob."

"No," said Deveridge. "I have had other matters on my hands, and have neglected that for two or three weeks past."

"Humph!" said Pillkins; "there is some

mystery about this affair. Those books are of no value to any one but you and me, Bob, and you have had charge of them. You must hunt them up."

"I shall do my best to find them," said Deveridge.

Pillkins left abruptly. About noon he returned.

"Have you found those books yet, Bob?" he inquired.

"No," replied Deveridge.

Pillkins turned on his heel, and walked off whistling. He returned again in the evening.

"Bob," said he, "you had better produce those books. I am a little too old to be humbugged in this way; and you ought to know better than to try it."

"What do you mean, Mr. Pillkins?" asked Deveridge, in amazement.

"I mean just this," replied Pillkins. "You have secreted those books for reasons and purposes of your own. You don't wish me to see them; but I must see them, and I *will* see them. Mark that."

"Mr. Pillkins," said Deveridge, "you have no right to make such an accusation. I have equal, and even better, grounds for charging you with having abstracted the books. You have had the opportunity, and may have had reasons for doing so; though I cannot conceive what advantage either of us could gain from secreting them."

"Humph!" said Pillkins; "that 's the key you sing in, is it? Very well, young man; I tell you you had better produce the books."

And again he walked away, as abruptly as he had come, in a state of apparent great indignation.

Deveridge, who was a quiet, unassuming young man, with little rude experience of the world, was terribly annoyed; the more so when he learned that Pillkins was circulating throughout Fossilburg the charge against him of having secreted the books for dishonest purposes. The conviction gradually forced itself upon his mind that Pillkins meant him mischief, — though in what manner he could not guess. He was to be enlightened, however.

In the morning Pillkins again visited him.

"Bob," said he, in a conciliatory tone, "we've been good friends, and never had any difficulty in our business before, and I don't wish to have any quarrel now; but I

think it is best that we should dissolve partnership. We can do it very quickly and fairly. We are equal partners. You may name a sum that you are willing to give for my interest, or take for your own; or, if you prefer it, I will make the offer. What do you say?"

"I am agreed," said Deveridge, after a few moments' consideration. "I leave it with you to make the offer."

"Very well," said Pillkins. "You agree to accept the sum I name, or to give it?"

"I do," said Deveridge.

"I propose, then," said Pillkins, "to give you two thousand dollars for your interest, or to take that amount for mine."

"Why?" said Deveridge. "the building, stock, and outstanding accounts are worth not less than ten thousand dollars. You do not offer half enough."

"I offer you what I am willing to take," replied Pillkins. "The building and stock appear to be making nothing, and as for the accounts, a great many of them are worthless. You have been very careless in giving credits, and, taking the accounts as they run, it will cost their face to collect them. Jones, of Black Ridge, who owed us six hundred dollars, has sold out, and gone to the States. Barry & Co., of Sports' Delight, are doing nothing, — absolutely bankrupt. Emery, of Foster's Flat, and Jenkins, of Sharpville, will never pay a cent on the dollar. I have had certain information about these parties, and what I state you may depend upon. Well, will you give, or take? Shall I write you a check? or will you write me one?"

Pillkins knew that Deveridge had no ready money. He had borrowed a part of the capital with which he commenced business; and repaying that, making some remittances to his mother, and maintaining himself economically, had exhausted every dollar he had drawn from the concern as his share of the profits. And Pillkins thought that the precaution he had taken to represent the young man's dishonesty, and the loss of money by the firm, taken in connection with the fact that money was exceedingly scarce in Fossilburg just then, would prevent his partner from obtaining at short notice such an amount as two thousand dollars. These were the considerations that induced him to name so small a sum; and the more he thought about it the more he was sorry he had not named fifteen hun-

dred dollars, as he felt certain that Deveridge would have been driven to accept even that sum.

"How about the accounts?" asked Deveridge.

"The purchaser shall take the accounts just as they stand in the book," answered Pillkins.

"I mean," said Deveridge, "our personal accounts; our liabilities to the firm, or its indebtedness to us severally."

"Everything goes," said Pillkins. "The purchase and sale wipes out everything between you and me up to this date, so far as it appears on the books. If there is anything behind the books, — that is, if you have received money that you have not entered, — you must account for it."

"When is the money to be paid?" asked Deveridge.

"Immediately," replied Pillkins; "that is, before six o'clock this evening."

"Very well," said Deveridge. "I will take your interest for the sum and on the conditions named."

Pillkins was astonished.

"Have you the money to pay down?" he asked.

"No," said Deveridge; "but I will try to get it."

"Remember," said Pillkins, "it must be paid by six o'clock."

"I understand that," replied Deveridge.

"And if you fail to pay it by that time," continued Pillkins, "I take the property at the same price."

"Certainly," said Deveridge.

"Now I want no backing out of this bargain," said Pillkins, whose confidence that he would yet be the purchaser was unabated. "I will just draw up an agreement, specifying all the conditions of our bargain, which we will sign in the presence of witnesses."

"Very good," said Deveridge.

The agreement was duly drawn up, witnessed, and deposited in the hands of a third party. Then Deveridge, with many misgivings, started out in quest of funds.

He had a friend named Holstein, a lawyer in good practice, and of excellent standing; and to him he thought best to apply for advice and direction. Having laid the whole matter before him, Holstein asked, —

"Has Pillkins made any return of his collections in the mountains a couple of weeks ago?"

"No," said Deveridge. "I did not know he had been in the mountains lately. He was in San Francisco two weeks ago."

"Before he went to San Francisco," said Holstein, "he made a tour through the upper mining towns and camps, — Sharpville, Sports' Delight, Black Ridge, Bunkum Hollow, Foster's Flat, Poverty Gulch, and other places, — and collected money from Barry & Co., Jones, Jenkins, Emery, and others, to the amount of over two thousand dollars. The way I happen to know it is this: John Wentworth, the deputy sheriff, was through there at the same time, serving summonses on grand and petit jurors; and he and Pillkins traveled together, and had a very jovial time, John tells me. And you tell me there is no entry of these collections on your books?"

"I don't know about that," replied Deveridge. "Since Pillkins's return, my cash-book and journal have been missing. I am inclined to think they are in his possession; and from the terms of our bargain, as proposed by himself, I am inclined to think he has made the entries with his own hand."

"Ah, yes! I had forgotten the missing books. Richard," said Holstein, opening the door to another apartment, and addressing his clerk, "come here a moment. You remarked yesterday, when Gaylord and I were speaking of Pillkins & Deveridge's books, that Sam Pillkins had them. Did you know that? or only guess at it?"

"Well, sir," replied Richard, "it was only a guess; but I am pretty sure I was right."

"Why so?" asked Holstein.

"Well, sir," answered Richard, "the way of it is just this: As I understand it, the books were missed yesterday morning. Well, night before last, as I was going up Nugget Street, I overtook Sam Pillkins walking along, and he had two books under his arm that looked like account books."

"Sam," says I, "what are you going to do with them books?"

"I 'm going into business, Dick," says he; "and I 've commenced keeping the books already."

"What business are you going into?" says I.

"I can't tell you about it yet," says he, "only it will be Pillkins & Son, instead of Pillkins & Somebody Else."

"That's all we talked about it."

"That's plain enough," said Holstein.

"Do you know where Sam Pillkins rooms, Richard?"

"Yes, sir."

"Can you get access to it in his absence?"

"I think I can manage it, sir."

"Well, go and get those books. Break no locks if you can help it: but get the books, at all hazards, and bring them here, and I will give you a ten-dollar piece, and stand between you and all harm. As quick as you can."

"Yes, sir," said Richard. And he started forthwith.

"The regular way of proceeding," said Holstein, "would be to procure a search-warrant; but that would take too much time: and, besides, I want to show the Pillkinses a little sharp practice. The old man, especially, will appreciate it."

Richard returned in due time with the missing books. On opening the journal, a paper fell out, which proved to be a memorandum, dated on the previous day, and signed by old Pillkins, directing Sam to enter immediately in the journal and cash-book certain specified collections made by the former, amounting to nineteen hundred and sixty-three dollars and fifty cents.

"So far so good," said Holstein. "Now I happen to have by me here two hundred dollars. Take it, and induce Pillkins to receipt for it as part of the purchase-money, subject to the conditions of your agreement. I think he will not object. The time is growing so short that he will think you can raise no more. After securing his receipt, which must specify distinctly the object of the payment, invite him to meet you here at my office, at five o'clock, to close the transaction. I will have everything in readiness."

Deveridge carried out his instructions successfully. Pillkins readily took the money, expecting to return it again within a few hours, and signed the receipt, which was drawn in such a manner as to afford strong additional evidence, if any were needed, of the contract between him and Deveridge. At five o'clock, punctually, he appeared in Holstein's office, prepared with the coin to pay for the property, which he did not for a moment doubt would be his. The gentleman who had custody of the original contract was also present, with Deveridge and Holstein.

"Well, Bob," said old Pillkins, with a

satisfied smirk, "I suppose you have that eighteen hundred dollars for me?"

"I have not," said Deveridge quietly.

"Aha! I thought so," said Pillkins, grinning. "I have twenty-two hundred here, at your service. But there is no hurry. It is nearly an hour to six; and maybe some one will come along, and make you a present of the money."

"We do not need it," said Mr. Holstein, taking up the conversation on the part of Deveridge. "The contract here calls for two thousand dollars. We have paid you two hundred, and we find that you have collected and not accounted for nineteen hundred and sixty-three dollars and fifty cents. You owe us just one hundred and sixty-three dollars and fifty cents. You will please pay us this difference, and sign this deed and this bill of sale which I have prepared here."

"You have got the amount of my collections, Mr. Holstein," said Pillkins, "with surprising accuracy. How you obtained your information, I don't know or care. But you have made one slight mistake: the different items making the aggregate amount you name were all entered in the books of the firm twenty-four hours ago; and by the terms of the contract the whole sum belongs to me, whether I am the purchaser of the property, or Mr. Deveridge."

"Mr. Deveridge," said Holstein, "when Mr. Pillkins requested you to produce those books, you obstinately refused to do so. I trust you will be more obliging when the request comes from me."

Deveridge took the books from the top of a desk, and laid them upon the lawyer's table.

"How the deuce did you get them?" inquired Pillkins, in great surprise.

"That is not the question at present," said Holstein coolly. "Be good enough to examine them, Mr. Pillkins. You will find that the mistake is with you."

Pillkins took the books, and hastily turned them over. His countenance fell.

"Sold, by the living jingo!" he exclaimed. "Beaten at my own game: and by my own son, too. D—n that boy! I shall be tempted to murder him!"

Finding himself ensnared, Pillkins, with a very bad grace, made the best of it, and, amid fearful imprecations upon his stupid offspring, signed the papers which put Deveridge in sole possession of the property.

Just as the business was concluded, Sam, who had been seeking his father, and finally traced him to Holstein's office, entered in haste and trepidation.

"O father!" he exclaimed, in a voice expressive of anguish and disappointment, and unheeding the presence of others, "it's all up down there!"

"And it's all up here too, thanks to your blundering, you infernal blockhead!" exclaimed old Pillkins, seizing his cane, and raising it threateningly. "Get out of my sight, you idiot, or I'll break every bone in your body!"

For a moment the youth stood paralyzed by this unexpected reception: then the old man made a rush at him, and Sam fled precipitately, followed by his enraged parent in hot pursuit.

For the explanation of Sam's pathetic revelation, which his father received with so little sympathy, we must return to the bedside of old Moggs. The very day that Pillkins set out upon his collection tour, which resulted so disastrously for him, old Moggs's physicians informed him, his wife being present, that their utmost skill was of no avail; that his disease was slowly but steadily encroaching upon his vitals, and would inevitably bring him to his grave; perhaps in a few days, — inevitably in a few short weeks.

Old Moggs received the announcement calmly. His wife manifested enough distress for a large family. She did not, however, after the first outburst, abandon herself altogether to grief. The time she had expected, the time for which she had assiduously prepared, had come at last; and she could not afford to waste the precious moments in idle lamentations.

She had from the commencement of old Moggs's illness a premonition that it would be fatal; and she had also from the first formed a determination to inherit the whole or the greater part of old Moggs's property. Hence her assiduous attention to him, and her studied and successful efforts to banish Albert from his home, and her constant endeavor to poison the old man's mind against the absent youth. She intercepted the letters which Albert had addressed to his father for some weeks after his flight; she related to old Moggs, with many expressions of sorrow and concern, apocryphal stories concerning his son's bad conduct, and the evil company he kept at "the bay;" and



when requested by old Moggs to write to the boy kindly, in his name, and ask him to return home, she pretended to do so; but did not, and then complained bitterly of his ungrateful silence. She even went so far as to fabricate a disrespectful message from Albert to his father, which she pretended to have received through a gentleman who had met the boy in San Francisco, and conversed with him about his family. Of course she studiously kept from her husband everybody who might, could, or would disabuse his mind in regard to his son's feelings toward him. And by these means she hoped she had succeeded in embittering old Moggs against Albert, and thus paving the way for the consummation of her own desires.

"My dear husband," said she, when the doctors had left them alone, and she could control her agitation sufficiently to speak, "it breaks my heart to think that I must so soon be left in this cold world without a protector, you have been such a good, kind husband to me."

"I am glad you think so, Sophronia," said old Moggs, turning his hideously bloated countenance upon his weeping wife; "but I think you'll get along as pleasantly without me. I have been a great burden to you; but you will be at least partly repaid. I shall leave you comfortably provided for."

"Oh, you good, generous man!" exclaimed she, with a burst of mingled tears and tenderness, gathering his ugly, swelled head to her bosom with an energy that made him wince, "you'll leave all to me, won't you, dear?"

"Well, no," said old Moggs, struggling with all his feebleness to free himself from her embrace, which was more ardent than soothing, "I guess not. You will have your lawful share as my widow; and that will be enough to keep you comfortably if you remain single, or to portion you handsomely if you marry again, — which I suppose you will do if you get a chance; and I should n't blame you, either. Remember, Sophronia, there are others beside you who have claims upon me."

She felt as if she would like to strangle him; but she only squeezed him a little more tightly, to the imminent peril of his respiration, as she replied, with more tears, —

"Of course, my dear, I did n't mean exactly all: there's Euphemia's been like a

daughter to you; and I know you won't forget her."

"There, there, Sophronia," exclaimed old Moggs impatiently, "you need n't choke me to death before my time comes. You seem to have forgotten that I have a son."

She wished he had forgotten it; but as he had not, she deemed it politic to recollect the fact.

"Oh, yes," she said. "Although Albert has been so very undutiful, it is but natural you should do something for him; though of course you won't think of putting a fortune in such hands. It would only bring him the sooner to a dishonored grave."

Old Moggs turned away, and closed his eyes, and his wife prudently forbore to press the subject any more at that time. But she returned to the charge again and again, until she found that so far as she was concerned her husband's mind was made up; and that she would receive not a cent more than her lawful dower.

But there was Euphemia. Old Moggs was evidently grateful to Euphemia, and might be induced to bestow upon her the other moiety of his estate, — barring a trifling sum to his son, — and to secure this result Mrs. Moggs exerted all her influence, all her persuasive powers, all her skill. She taught Euphemia the trick of tears, so that old Moggs was often edified upon awaking from a brief slumber by finding his devoted sister-in-law weeping over him. And the two used, when out of sight, but within hearing, to engage in such pathetic lamentations over him, and such delicious eulogiums of him! What effect this had upon him he did not reveal; but (as I think I have already stated) he had once been an actor himself. He gave them no further satisfaction than to order a special messenger to be sent for his son, — which his wife promised should be done immediately, but took good care it should not.

Old Moggs grew worse, and the sisters grew desperate. They feared he would die without making a will. As a last resort, they called in the assistance of Sam Pillkins, who was already in their councils; and they resolved to bring their united forces to bear upon old Moggs, assailing him at once, as it were, in front and on both flanks. The time chosen for the grand assault, which it was hoped would bring the moribund old man to reason, was, as it happened, the afternoon of the same day when

old Pillkins was endeavoring, with such admirable want of success, to swindle Robert Deveridge.

When the triple alliance entered his chamber, old Moggs lay on his back, with his eyes directed toward the ceiling; but whether he noted the movements of the flies thereon disporting, or "in profound abstraction gazed into the dun obscure of his own mind," it would be difficult to tell. He was evidently so weak that the trio thought he could be easily awed into submission to their wills, and resolved to strike boldly. Sam Pillkins drew a table to the side of the bed, placed writing materials on it, and sat down beside it with a professional air: he took no notice of the movement. Then Euphemia coughed, sighed, and remarked, —

"My poor, dear brother!" — she had lately got the trick of calling him brother, — "how badly he looks."

Old Moggs seemed still to ignore their presence. Mrs. Moggs then advanced to the bedside, and said, —

"My dear husband, it is a painful task to me to remind you of your duty. Your final hour is approaching, and you should lose no time in preparing for it. We are here for the purpose of learning your last wishes; and Mr. Pillkins is ready to write your will."

"Yes, Mr. Moggs," said Sam, as the dying man continued gazing vacantly at the ceiling, "I am, as you are aware, a lawyer," — at these words, the invalid turned his head, and regarded the speaker with a stony stare, — "and of course am accustomed to drawing up such documents. I will commence in the usual form."

He wrote rapidly for a few minutes.

"I give and bequeath," said he at length, repeating the words as they flowed from his pen, "to my beloved wife, Sophronia Moggs, one-half" —

"Oh, no, Mr. Pillkins," interrupted Mrs. Moggs, "two-thirds, — write it two-thirds."

Sam looked at the invalid, who looked back at him with his fixed, stony stare. Interpreting silence as consent, he finished the paragraph as Mrs. Moggs desired and directed.

"And to my beloved sister-in-law," continued Sam, writing, "Euphemia Mer-gles" —

"The remaining one-third," suggested Mrs. Moggs.

Sam again looked at the invalid, and receiving consent as before, proceeded, —

"The remaining one-third of all my estate, real, personal, and mixed" —

At that moment there was a rattling step on the front piazza, a rapid stride through the hall, the door of the sick chamber flew open with a clang, and Albert, overthrowing the writing-table in his haste, rushed to his father's bedside.

"My dear father!" he exclaimed, embracing the old man as well as he could under the circumstances. There were so many pillows and bed-clothes and things in the way that a regular stage embrace was out of the question.

"God bless you, my boy!" fervently ejaculated the old man, his puffy and livid countenance brightening with joy as he returned his son's embrace with a surprising degree of energy. "I knew you would come: the sight of you does me more good than doctors or nurses. But I should feel much better, Albert, if you would kick that *thing*" — pointing to Sam, who had hastily risen, on Albert's entrance, and stood looking on with much the feeling of one who has gained surreptitious admittance to a theatre, and fears detection — "out of the house."

Albert, who was a stalwart youth for his years, instantly seized the fellow by the collar, and, in spite of his remonstrances, and the shrieks of the women, propelled him to and through the front door with a vigorous application of sole-leather.

"Now," said the old man, when Albert returned from the execution of his task, "turn out these women, and shut the door."

Which having been done, explanations ensued between old Moggs and young Moggs which were highly satisfactory to both. In a few days, old Moggs dismissed his physicians, having secured the services of an old quack from San Francisco, who cured him, to the great disgust of the regular faculty.

Euphemia retired to Snail Hollow, where, in hopeless single cussedness, she assists her mother in waiting upon guests at the Travelers' Rest, while Mrs. Moggs subsided into the third place in her husband's household.

Old Moggs manages the Blunderbore mill and mine with all his former energy and success; while Albert, content with his histrionic laurels, is taking lessons with his father in practical milling and mining.

# ON A MIDSUMMER NIGHT.

BY MISS ELLIS CLARE.

"*Bonjour, Maitre Picard.* Can I have a word with you?"

Maitre Picard, the miller of Montvert—a little spare dry chip of a man, with a brown weather-beaten face carved into a myriad of crooked wrinkles, and keen bird-like eyes—was stooping to tie up a sack of flour at the foot of the mill steps. On being thus addressed, he raised his head, which was decorated with a striped cotton night-cap, and, shading his eyes from the glare of the June sunset, looked up at the speaker, a stalwart young Norman of five-and-twenty, fair-haired, fair-bearded, with frank vivacious blue eyes and handsome sun-burnt features.

"*Bonjour, Andre Leblond.* A word with me? Certainly,—as many as you like. Come indoors." And, clapping his hands to rid them of the flour, he led the way across the green which lay between the mill and the house.

The old windmill of Montvert, on its breezy height, looked out over sunny slopes across a wide fertile valley, through which a little pastoral river wound its way between banks of grass and meadow-sweet and under rows of whispering poplars. The house, an ancient weather-stained building of graystone, with low arched doorways, and dim little hooded casements in its high thatched roof, stood on the southern slope of the hill, surrounded by an irregular assemblage of barns and out-buildings. Maitre Picard was a farmer as well as a miller, and the largest land-owner for miles round, with corn-fields and apple-orchards, and stretches of rich pasture, where the sleek Normandy cattle grazed and fattened. In front of the house was a spacious courtyard, populous with fowls, ducks, pigs, and pigeons; the latter had their abode in a quaint little pointed turret, which protruded like a horn from one end of the house.

"Splendid weather for the hay," remarked the visitor as they crossed the green.

"Too good to last," returned the miller, with a distrustful glance at the flaming sunset sky.

"I hope it will hold up till after Midsummer Day; we shall have finished carrying by then," said his companion. "By the way, Maitre Picard, we hear that you intend to have no bonfire on St. John's Eve this year; is it true?"

"Perfectly true. Well?"

"Why, it will hardly seem like Midsummer without the Montvert bonfire; and they say it brings good luck."

The other snorted contemptuously.

"Luck? Bah! It will bring bad luck to me when it sets the mill on fire; and that's what I've expected every Midsummer Eve this many a year."

"But it has not happened yet, you see."

"Ah, the pitcher may go once too often to the well!" was the miller's oracular reply, as he preceded his visitor into the dusky, cool, spacious kitchen, with its stone floor, and wide hearth with the overhanging chimney, its old oak armoire, and glittering array of pots and pans ranged like trophies against the wall.

As he entered, a shrill voice cried joyfully, "Here's dear father!" And then a little crutch came tapping rapidly across the floor, and two little arms were thrown round his knees.

Maitre Picard's only son was a cripple,—a frail gentle little lad of five years, with wide solemn dark eyes, which seemed several sizes too large for his small pale face. With a smile of tenderness which transfigured his hard features, the miller bent over his motherless child.

"Yes, here I am, little one," he said, giving the expected kiss; "but I cannot take thee now,—I am busy. There: run to Denise. Come in, Monsieur Leblond."

The child obediently limped off to his sister, who sat near the window, peeling vegetables for the supper-soup. She was a tall slim girl of nineteen, with a clear complexion, which the sun had kissed into warmth, and soft velvety brown eyes,—eyes so beautiful that in looking at them one forgot to criticise the other features. She looked up as the visitor entered, and greeted him with a quick, bright smile of welcome.

A furtive glance of intelligence was exchanged between them, and then the young man uncovered, and saluted her with formal politeness.

"*Bonjour, Ma'm'selle Denise. I hope I see you well. You are busy as usual.*"

"As usual," repeated Denise cheerfully.

"It is a long time since we saw you at Montvert, Monsieur Andre. Your mother is well?"

"As well as usual, thanks; but the rheumatism gives her little rest, even in the summer. Our house is damp, you see, the land being ill drained."

"But it is good land," asserted the miller, as he sat down on a chair near the hearth, and took out his pipe, — "very good land, La Chenaie."

"Not bad," the young man allowed, shrugging one shoulder; "but, as my father used to say, it has never been properly cultivated. It wants capital."

"It wants capital? A-ah!" responded Maitre Picard, lengthening the ejaculation into a sort of snarl, as he stooped over the hearth and lighted his pipe at one of the smouldering brands.

Andre, glancing at Denise, wondered why she frowned at him as if he had made a mistake; but he soon forgot that speculation and everything else in thinking what a pretty picture she made as she sat near the casement, a slanting ray of evening sunshine lighting up her brown hair, her high white coiffe, quaint silver ear-rings, and skirt of dark-blue serge, with a great heap of vegetables at her feet, — big round lettuces, carrots, leeks, and beans, all tumbled together in a picturesque confusion. The miller glanced over his shoulder at the visitor, and frowned, as if something displeased him.

"Denise," he said sharply, "it is Pierre's bed-time."

"Yes, father, I am just going to take him."

She rose as she spoke, shook the peelings from her apron, and threw the prepared vegetables into the great iron soup-kettle hanging over the fire, and then turned to the little lad, who had followed her about, watching her proceedings with a face of grave interest.

"Come then, my bird, — it is time to go to roost! The dustman is coming by presently to throw dust into the eyes of little folk who ought to be in bed. Kiss father, and say good-night."

The miller put down his pipe, and opened his arms wide to take the child.

"Good-night, my heart, my treasure," he murmured. "Angels guard thee!" And, taking the little warm face between his brown hands, he looked at it with devouring tenderness, kissed it again and again, and then relinquished little Pierre to his sister.

"Say '*Bonsoir, Monsieur Andre,*'" prompted Denise; and, putting the little hand to her lips, she sent the visitor a kiss by deputy, with another of her sweet smiles.

"*Bonsoir, Mos'sieu Andre,*" chirped little Pierre.

"Good-night, little one; sleep well!" said the young man pleasantly, returning both the smile and the kiss; and he watched the girl as she crossed the kitchen with the child in her arms and ascended the steep stairs.

Left *tete a tete* with his host, the visitor seemed to find a difficulty in opening the conversation.

"Won't you sit down?" said Maitre Picard dryly; and the other, who had forgotten that he was standing, hastily subsided into a chair on the opposite side of the hearth, where he sat turning his hat about in his hands and absently examining the maker's name inside. The miller meanwhile smoked on placidly, looking at the fire. At length, "taking his courage in both hands," Andre plunged into his subject.

"Maitre Picard, I am come to renew the proposal I made two years ago for your daughter's hand."

"Well?" interrogated Maitre Picard, letting the word escape at that corner of his mouth in which his pipe was not.

"You declined it then on the ground that Denise was too young, and that I was too poor; but you gave me leave to hope that, if in two years' time I could raise myself to a better position, you would reconsider your refusal. You remember?"

"Perfectly."

"Well," the young farmer continued, gathering courage as he went on, "I think I may say I have succeeded. I have been very lucky these last two years; everything seems to have prospered with me. I have bought fresh land, and have put my money in the bank" —

"Very proper, — very prudent," interposed his companion, between two puffs.

"And altogether my prospects have never looked so bright. I love Denise fondly and truly, Maitre Picard, as she deserves to be loved; and, if you will give her to me, I will do all a man can do to make her happy."

The miller, in a cool, leisurely way, extinguished his pipe, knocked out the ashes against the leg of his chair, and put the pipe in the breast-pocket of his coat; then, looking across at his companion, he said deliberately, —

"I thank you for the honor you have done me, Monsieur Andre Leblond; and I beg to decline your proposal."

Andre's face, in its sudden change from cheerful confidence to rueful amazement, was a study.

"You refuse me — again? Well, but — you said — you as good as promised, when we spoke of this before" —

"Listen!" interrupted the miller, tapping his nose with his fore-finger by way of emphasis. "This is what I said: 'If, in two years' time, you are in a suitable position, and if Denise is still free' — mark that 'if'!" —

"Well, she is still free! She told me so herself!"

"Ah, indeed! When was that? When did you see her alone?" was the quick question.

Andre colored, and bit his lip.

"We — I — I sometimes walk a little way with her on Sundays, after church."

"Oh, indeed?" said the miller, resolving on the spot that for the future Monsieur le Cure should not have to complain of his non-attendance. "But you see, I have not yet told Denise of his intentions," he resumed. "She does not know that she is promised, or as good as promised, to my friend and neighbor, Simon Moreau."

Andre's chair squeaked on the stone floor, as he pushed it back half a yard in his indignant astonishment.

"Good Heavens, Maitre Picard, you can't mean it! Simon Moreau — a man old enough to be her father — coarse, vulgar, uneducated boor, who is" —

"The richest man between here and Fougères," interposed the miller, with a nod.

"And you will sell your daughter to the highest bidder, without even letting her have a voice in the matter? You will" —

"Oh, Denise will not oppose me! She

knows her duty too well for that," he interrupted.

"Then it is the more shame for you to make use of her submission to break her heart," was the quick retort. "You'll forgive me if I speak warmly; but I feel strongly."

"Yes, I make allowance; you are disappointed, naturally," the miller returned, taking a pinch of snuff. "My daughter's dowry would have been useful — *hein?* The farm 'wants capital.' A-ah, I understand!" And he shut his snuff-box with a snap, smiling sourly as he glanced at his visitor under his floury brows.

The young farmer flushed up to his bronzed temples.

"I am no fortune-hunter, Maitre Picard; I think you know that. I protest against such an accusation," he began hastily.

"Good; when you have done protesting, I will wish you good-evening."

"Nay, but listen to me," Andre pleaded, conquering his resentment by an effort. "I am quite willing to take your daughter penniless, if you will give her to me on those terms."

"Good-evening," was the only reply.

"Consider what you are doing!" cried the young man, with passionate earnestness. "We have loved each other for years, Denise and I; it will break our hearts to divide us. And think what the poor child's life will be, as the wife of such a man as Moreau! Even if you persist in refusing her to me, don't — for Heaven's sake, don't give her to him!"

"Good-evening," said the miller once more; and this time his finger pointed to the door.

Andre, glancing at the stern set face, saw that all his eloquence was thrown away. With a sigh of despair, he took up his hat, and rose.

"You refuse me then — unconditionally?"

"Exactly; and, if you come again on the same errand, I shall shut the door in your face."

"I shall trouble you no more," the young man replied as he passed through the door.

As he was moving slowly and sorrowfully away, a window high up in the steep roof, above the door, opened noiselessly, and Denise looked out. She called to him softly, —

"Wait for me by the bridge."

He nodded, and walked away across the

yard, and along the unfenced road which wound down the hill-side into the valley below.

At the foot of the hill was a stream, crossed by a quaint stone bridge with one wide arch and one narrow one. Beyond the bridge a lonely lane led between high banks and tangled hedgerows to the village of Ste. Marie-les-Chenes, three miles away.

The young man rested his arms on the mossy parapet, and looked down at the clear golden-brown water, which ran by with a gentle monotonous murmur over its bed of black and white pebbles and yellow sand. The martins chased each other with shrill cries under the old gray arches; the dragon-flies darted to and fro above the stream; now and then a water-rat splashed down under the reedy bank. The soughing of the scythe and the voices of haymakers at their task were wafted on the breeze from the distant meadows, with the warm sweet smell of new-mown hay. Sunshine lay broad and bright over all the smiling, sunny land.

Andre was not insensible to the beauty of the golden summer evening, but in his present mood it chafed instead of soothing him. *He felt an irrational sort of impatience with nature for looking at him with this serene unconscious smile when his heart was full of grief and bitterness.*

At length the sound of a quick light foot-step made him look up with a start, and the next moment Denise was by his side. She was out of breath with the haste she had made, and could not protest, even had she been inclined to do so, when her lover, taking her hands in his, drew her to him, and kissed her on both cheeks.

"I dare not stay long, or father will miss me," she said hurriedly. "Have you spoken to him? What did he say? Ah, I see the answer in your face!" she broke off. "He has refused you!"

"Yes, Denise, he has refused me. And do you know what reason he gives? That you are promised to another?"

She started.

"Promised?" she repeated breathlessly. "To whom am I promised?"

"To Simon Moreau," he said.

She drew back, looking at him blankly, the color fading from her face.

"No, it is impossible; father cannot mean it!"

"That is what I said when he told me;

but he does mean it, Denise. He refuses you to me, and he will give you to that boor, who is not worthy to kiss your shoe! Great Heaven, how shall I bear it?" he exclaimed, with a passionate gesture. "To have worked for you, hoped for you, lived for you, all these years, and now, after all" —

His voice broke, and he turned away his head abruptly.

Denise stood at his side with the same blank, stunned look on her face.

"But are you sure there is no hope?" she asked in an eager, tremulous undertone. "Did you remind him of his promise two years ago?"

"You may be sure I did not forget that. I used every argument I could think of; but there, — I might as well have talked to a stone!"

With a gesture of despair she let her hands fall to her sides.

"If he has made up his mind, nothing will move him. It is all over!"

"But it is not — it shall not be!" her lover exclaimed impetuously. "Do you think I will give you up so lightly, after loving you so long? Not at your father's or any other man's bidding! Denise, listen. In less than a year you will be of age; and then, if he still refuses his consent, why — we will do without it! You need not look so shocked," he added impatiently. "It is not a crime I am proposing."

Denise shook her head.

"If I set him at defiance, he will curse me, — and that would be terrible," she said. "No blessing would rest on our marriage, for certain."

"And will the blessing rest on the one he has planned for you?" her companion asked. "Will your father's approval make you any happier as Moreau's wife? Just think what your life will be in the long years to come. If you have no pity on me, have pity on yourself, Denise."

She nervously twisted the quaint old ring on her finger, her eyes full of trouble and perplexity.

"Dear," she said slowly at last, "I must not think of myself in this matter. If I did, I should never have courage to say to you what I say now with a sorrowful heart, — we must part." Her voice faltered, and she paused a moment, then went on, "Even if I could bring myself to disobey my father, there would still be an obstacle between us.

If I married without his consent, I should come to you penniless, and "—

"What of that?" he interrupted quickly. "Your love is dower enough for me, my sweet."

"Ah, no!" Denise returned, shaking her head. "It is not as if you were rich. You have your fortune still to make; and, as your mother said to me the last time I saw her, an imprudent marriage would hamper you for life."

"The mother need not have said that," said Andre, frowning.

"But it is quite true, dear. And, knowing this, can I be so selfish, so cruel as to"—

"Denise, Denise," he interrupted passionately, "do not break my heart! What is poverty compared to the loss of you? Ah!" he added bitterly, "you do not love me, or you would not talk in that strain!"

"Do not I?" she questioned with tender reproach. "I love you too well to injure you. It is love, as well as duty, that holds me back from you."

"I think you do not know what love means," was his reply. "If you felt for me as I do for you, *nothing—nothing* would hold you back from these longing arms and this lonely heart of mine. Ah, no, Denise, you do not care for me! I have been miserably mistaken."

The tears rushed to her eyes, and her lips quivered.

"You are mistaken now," she said in a tone half proud, half sad; "but think as you will. You do not understand me: that is all."

Both were silent a moment, Andre staring moodily at the ground, his companion looking sorrowfully away over the sunlit meadows. At length the sound of a horse approaching along the lane roused them both.

"I must go now," said the girl, with a sigh, looking at him wistfully as she put out her hand. "If we must part, Andre, let us not part in anger. Forgive me, dear, and—forget me."

He turned and looked at her, then suddenly, with an inarticulate sound of tenderness, caught both her hands in his, and drew her to his breast.

"Forget you? When I forget there is a heaven above us!" he added in a passionate undertone, and, taking her face in his hands, he kissed her on her eyes, her lips, her brow. "You love me; we will not

be parted," he whispered, laying his bearded cheek against her forehead; "I cannot live without you. Listen, dearest. I told your father I should trouble him no more; but I am resolved to make one last appeal to him. If he repeats his refusal, then you will have to choose between him and me. You understand?"

"I understand," Denise replied; "but wait a few days before you speak to him again. He"—

She broke off, glancing nervously down the lane.

"Look, Andre! it is Monsieur Moreau!" she whispered. "Let me go; he must not see me here."

Andre glanced over his shoulder at the approaching horseman, muttering something that was certainly not a benediction.

"I shall come to Montvert again in a fortnight,—on Midsummer Eve," he said hurriedly; "till then, adieu, dear one!"

Adieu!" she echoed, as she waved her hand to him and hurried away.

With tender, regretful eyes, he watched her retreating figure till it fluttered out of sight, then turned, with a very different expression, toward the new-comer, whose sleek gray mare was advancing at a foot-pace along the lane. Simon Moreau was a stout, heavy-featured man of middle-age, with a course mouth and an obstinate chin.

He was plainly, almost meanly, dressed in homespun gray; but this affectation of poverty was belied by the look of snug prosperity on his stolid face and sturdy figure.

"Bonsoir, Leblond," he said, with a patronizing nod, as he crossed the bridge. "I am going to the mill; have you any message for Mademoiselle Denise?"

His self-confident smile exasperated Andre.

"I should not make you the bearer of it if I had," he replied brusquely, as he turned on his heel and walked away, fuming with jealous resentment.

A fortnight had passed since the lovers parted at the old bridge. It was Midsummer Eve,—a serene and exquisite night, steeped in dew and fragrance. Not a cloud dimmed the wide tranquil expanse of violet sky, in which the full moon hung like a great silver lamp. Woods and fields lay sleeping in the white ethereal light; now and then the warm sweet air was stirred by a languid breeze, which just thrilled through

the leaves, blurred their shadows on the moonlit grass, and died away drowsily. In the great bowery garden of La Chenaie, Andre's home, the flowers and sweet herbs were pouring out their hearts to the night; sweet-brier and southernwood, jasmine, pink, and rose mingled their fragrance with the all-pervading scent of new-mown hay. The farm was very still; the haymakers had finished their work long since; the horses were stabled, the cars turned up on end. Now and then the watch-dog rattled his chain, an invisible calf bleated plaintively, a horse stamped in the stables, the crickets kept up their shrill gossip.

In the quaint stone kitchen, the Widow Leblond, a wrinkled, sun-burnt woman, with a hard-featured but not unkindly face, and quick, dark eyes, was bending over the wood-fire, preparing a savory chicken for supper, while Garvaise, the maid-servant, set the table, and Andre, who had just returned from a ride, leaned with folded arms against the doorway, looking out over the moonlit courtyard and the dim fields beyond toward Montvert. The blaze of a great bonfire reddened the sky above the hill and cast a lurid glow over the surrounding country.

"So the miller has a Midsummer fire after all, though he vowed he would have no more," remarked Madame Leblond, glancing through the casement without raising her head from the saucepan she was stirring.

Andre made a sound of assent.

"Little Pierre begged him to have one, madame, — that is the reason," said Garvaise, joining in the conversation in her slow and drawling Norman voice; "Madelon, at the mill, told me. And she says that Maitre Picard would burn his house down to please the child, he is that foolish about him."

"He is making a rod for his own back," observed her mistress.

"Yes, madame. And it is a shame, Madelon says, to see how he slights Ma'm'selle Denise, when she is such a good daughter, and" —

"There, there!" interrupted the widow, with a glance at her son. "Who cares to know what Madelon says? Listen, girl; I will have no more gossiping with the mill servants. What goes on up there does not interest or concern any one in this house. You understand? Now go and draw the

cider. Supper is ready, my son," she added, as the girl sulkily obeyed.

"I don't care for any tonight, mother; I am not hungry."

"Not hungry?" she echoed. "What's the matter with you, I should like to know? Have you a headache? Do you want" —

"I want nothing but to be let alone," he interrupted wearily. "What does it matter if I go without my supper for once?"

She raised her dark eyebrows with a look of perplexity.

"What has come to you tonight, lad? You have been like a man bewitched ever since you came back from your ride. Where did you go, by the by?" she added, with a quick change of tone, pausing in the act of transferring the contents of the saucepan to a dish.

"To Montvert."

His mother bit her lip.

"If you had a spark of pride, you would never have set foot in that house again, after the reception you met with last time."

"I did not set foot in it," he returned, with a dreary smile, "for the miller was as good as his word, and shut the door in my face."

With a bang she set down the dish on the table, and turned toward him, flushing up to her sun-burnt forehead.

"What! He did? Ciel, I wish I had been there! Who is he — the old curmudgeon — that he should dare to insult my son? Is n't Leblond as good as Picard? Ay, my faith, and a hundred times better! But it is your own fault," she went on, turning the current of her wrath upon Andre, — "your own fault entirely. What need was there for you to humble yourself to him, begging and praying for his daughter as if there was no other woman in the world but Denise Picard?"

"There is no other in the world for me."

"Rubbish!" cried his mother irritably. "You know you can't have her! What's the use of crying for the moon? I hope," she added, with an uneasy glance at him, "that you have not been trying to persuade the girl into — into any romantic folly?"

"I have done my best to persuade her to marry me, if that is what you mean," he said, as she paused. "I asked her a fortnight ago, and again, tonight, when I saw her for a few minutes at the bridge."

"Ah! And she" —

"Refused. She would not marry under



her father's curse, and bring misfortune on us both," she said. "You may be quite easy, mother; it is all over."

She drew a breath of relief.

"Denise is a good, dutiful girl," she said warmly; "she deserves to be happy, and will be. And so will you, my son, if, instead of wasting your breath in singing for what you can't have, you will pluck up a spirit and let me look out for a wife to suit you. I"—

"Mother," interrupted Andre, turning his head, "you need not seek a wife for me. I will have Denise Picard or none!"

"Then, my son, you will have none," she replied, with an emphatic nod; "Denise will probably be Madame Moreau before harvest. I heard today that the marriage is delayed only till Moreau and old Picard can agree about the amount of the dowry."

Andre abruptly changed his position, and loosened his collar as if he were suffocating; then he took up his hat from a chair near the door.

"Where art thou going?" she interposed, feeling somewhat remorseful as she caught a glimpse of his face.

"For a walk in the fields. Don't sit up for me," he answered briefly. And before she could speak again he had left the house.

He slowly crossed the court-yard, and passed through a gate into the fragrant darkness of the orchard, where long leafy vistas lost themselves in depths of mysterious gloom, traversed here and there by a furtive moonbeam which played on some gnarled bough or lichen-crustled trunk. Beyond the orchard lay the open fields, silvery with dew and moonlight.

Andre wandered slowly on in the radiant stillness from field to field, over the short, sweet, new-mown grass, and among the scented hay-cocks, till he reached a gate which opened into the lane. From this point it was but five minutes' walk to the village. He paused, and leaned with folded arms on the gate, looking out over the wide dim country, and drinking in the sweetness of the summer night. On the hill of Montvert the bonfire was still blazing fiery red through the darkness. He had spent many a Midsummer Eve there, and could picture the scene as vividly as if he had been present,—the great roaring fire on the mill green, lighting up with a weird red glare the faces of the crowd, and casting long fantas-

tic shadows across the grass; the old mill, looking, in the fitful light, like some grim giant with arms outstretched; the dark figures passing to and fro before the fire, or dancing hand in hand around it, singing an old tuneless chorus; the sharp crackling of the flames; the aromatic smell of pine-wood and dried moss. It all came back to him as he watched.

At length the bonfire, having reached its climax, gradually sank and failed till only a dull red glow was left; then a long wavering line of red sparks came undulating like a fiery snake down the dark hill-side; the revellers were returning in an impromptu torch-light procession to the village. Soon Andre could hear in the distance their shouts and laughter; and presently a company of them went past him down the lane, their torches scattering a shower of sparks on the hedgerows. When they had passed, and the last echo of their voices had died away, the silence and solitude seemed almost oppressive.

With a heavy sigh he let fall his head upon his folded arms. A dreadful sense of desolation lay like lead upon his heart. His love for Denise was woven like a golden thread into the very texture of his daily life; all his hopes and ambitions clustered round her image, and in losing her he lost them too. But it was not for his own loss only that he grieved. When he thought of Denise's fate, his heart thrilled with indignant pity. To be chained for life to a man she could not even esteem, suffering the daily torture of companionship with a coarse ignoble nature, her heart slowly withering, her spirit losing its brightness, her sweet eyes their light! A pang that was like absolute physical pain shot through him at the thought, and with a sobbing sigh he put both hands to his broad chest; then, turning from the placid moonlit landscape, he threw himself upon the sloping bank at the foot of the hedge.

The gentle night-breeze went whispering by through the leaves above his head; now and then a bird in the hedge uttered a sleepy chirp; an unseen brook somewhere in the field kept up a faint murmur, as if it were talking in its sleep; far away, in the oak wood which gave the farm its name, a nightingale was singing, setting to music all the poetry of the summer night, with its vague pathos and delicious melancholy.

The moments slowly lengthened into

hours. At length, overcome by fatigue, Andre sank into a doze, and from thinking of Denise, fell to dreaming of her. He dreamt that he was once more in the mill kitchen, watching her as she descended the stairs with little Pierre in her arms. Suddenly, as she turned her face toward him over her shoulder, he saw its expression change to a look of agonized terror.

"Little Pierre is falling! save him!" she screamed.

He hastily extended his arms to catch the child, and with the effort awoke,—awoke with a start, and with that terrified cry still ringing in his ears. The impression of the dream was so strong that his heart beat fast as he scrambled to his feet and looked round him, dreading he knew not what.

He found that he had been sleeping some time, for the moon was low in the east. The breeze had sighed itself to sleep; everything was profoundly still. Glancing instinctively across the fields toward Montvert, he drew back with a smothered cry. Was he dreaming still, or was the bonfire blazing again on the hill? What was that red tongue of flame that leaped and flickered against the purple darkness of the sky?

Another look, and the dreadful truth broke upon him. A calamity worse than that Maitre Picard had foreboded had come to pass,—the house was on fire! The flames were bursting fiercely from the thatched roof,—that roof beneath which perhaps the inmates still slept, unconscious of danger!

For a moment he stood gazing at it like one in a dream; then, rousing himself with a start, he turned and ran back home as if he were running for his life. To wake the farm-servants, despatch one to the village for assistance, and another to Fougères for the engines, was the work of a few moments; then he saddled his horse, and set off at a headlong gallop to the mill. As he tore along the lonely lanes his dream came back to him with thrilling vividness. Denise's horror-stricken face rose before him; her scream still rang through the silence. Straining his eyes through the gloom, he saw that the red light on the distant hill was growing higher and brighter every moment. Suppose he arrived too late to warn or save? His heart turned cold with fear.

At length the bridge was reached and crossed, and the horse rushed on with

scarcely slackened speed up the winding hill-road beyond.

And now Andre could see what terrible progress the fire had already made. One end of the house was enveloped in flames; the roof was alight from end to end, and the burning thatch, falling piecemeal in great flakes, sent up showers of sparks and a dense cloud of smoke, which hung like a pall above the hill. A confused noise of shouting which reached him as he approached told him, to his great relief, that the inmates were aroused. Midway up the ascent he was compelled to alight, his frightened horse refusing to proceed; hastily tying the bridle to a tree by the roadside, he hurried on.

A bewildering glare of light, a roaring of flames, a crackling of wood, a hubbub of excited voices, and trampling of hurried footsteps,—these were the sights and sounds that greeted him when he reached the court-yard gate.

Just as he was passing through, a white figure with streaming hair rushed past him. He caught it by the arm, exclaiming "Denise!"

It was not she, however, but Madelon the maid-servant, half dressed, and wild with terror. She screamed when he touched her, and at first replied only by a vacant stare to his eager question, —

"Are you all safe?"

"The miller is safe enough; he is among the men yonder," she answered at length.

"And Denise?"

"Ma'm'selle Denise is a mile or more away,—at her Aunt Vernier's at Preville. The master sent her there this evening."

He drew a deep breath of relief.

"And little Pierre—did she take him with her?"

"I—think so," she stammered.

"You think?" he cried. "Don't you know whether she did or not?"

"I did not see her leave the house. I told the master she had taken the child,—I thought she would be sure to do so; but—but"—

She hesitated, and began to tremble.

"But what?" he asked loudly, seized with a sudden dread.

She glanced at him fearfully.

"When the fire broke out," she faltered, "I woke in a fright and rushed down-stairs. I noticed nothing at the time; but afterward I—I thought I recollected seeing

him in his cot in her room as I passed the door."

"You saw him, and left him there!" he cried, recoiling from her in horror.

She sobbed and wrung her hands.

"I am not sure that he was there; I only fancied — I was mad with fright."

He put her roughly away from him, and hurried into the yard in search of the miller. He found him the centre of a group of men — his own servants and those of Simon Moreau, whose farm adjoined Montvert — occupied in getting the terrified horses out of the stable, where the fire had first broken out. Andre touched his arm.

"Did Denise take the child with her to Preville?" he asked, without preface.

The miller turned and looked at him. With his face blackened by smoke and dust, and his tasseled night-cap all awry. Maitre Picard was an object at once grim and grotesque.

"Of course she took him. Madelon told me — Good Heaven," he broke off, noticing the expression of the young man's face, "you do not mean" —

The words died on his lips; his brown face blanched suddenly to a dreadful sickly pallor; he staggered back as if from a sudden blow, and looked with wild, dilated eyes toward the burning house.

"No, no! I hope and pray that he is not there!" Andre cried. "But, if Denise — Thank Heaven, here she is!" he exclaimed, as Denise herself came hurrying up to them, white with excitement and breathless with running.

"O father! — what a calamity!" she panted. "I saw the light from my — bedroom window at Aunt Vernier's, and I have — run — all the — way." Then, looking round, she added, "Where is Pierre?"

The question struck cold to the hearts of the listeners. They looked aghast into each other's faces, and no one replied. Her father caught her by the arm, and shook her in his excitement.

"You — you took him with you!" he gasped hoarsely. "Girl, what are you thinking of?"

Denise looked at him blankly.

"Father, I did not take him. I thought you knew. I put him to bed in his little cot in my room before I started, and" —

"In your room?" echoed Moreau, who stood near. "Then Heaven help him!

Look there!" And he pointed to the casement half-way up the steep roof. It was open, and barbs of fire like serpents' tongues darted from it, while the flames from the burning thatch played above and around it.

With a dreadful inarticulate cry, like that of some wild animal bereaved of its young, the miller threw his arms above his head, and rushed back to the house. He would have flung himself recklessly into the midst of the flames if one of the men had not thrown his arms round his waist and restrained him. He struggled like a madman.

"Let me go, or I shall do you a mischief!" he shouted. "Let me go to my child — O Heaven, my little helpless child!"

"It is too late, Picard," said Simon Moreau, who had followed him. "The staircase is on fire; you could not reach the room, and even if you did you would be sure not to find the child alive now."

The miller made another frantic effort to get free, but his strength seemed to fail him all at once. His whole figure collapsed — he tottered, and fell upon his knees.

"My child, my child, my child!" he repeated over and over again in a hoarse whisper, as his head sank forward upon his breast.

A moan of pity ran through the crowd, gradually swelling to a loud, confused murmur.

"Get through the window!" shouted some one in the background; but no one volunteered. The smoke and flames were pouring more fiercely every moment from the window, and the room within appeared like a furnace. Denise looked despairingly round for Andre, but he had disappeared.

"No one in his senses would attempt it," muttered Moreau with a shrug. "A man's life is worth more than a child's, — a poor little cripple, who would have been a misery to himself and a burden to others if he had lived. Perhaps it is all for the best," he added philosophically.

He had not imagined that his words would reach the miller's ears, and he drew back with a start when the latter, suddenly raising his head, looked him full in the face, and repeated, with a slow, bitter smile, —

"All for the best!" If the boy is taken, there will be the more for the girl: isn't that it?"

Moreau's swarthy face turned darkly red.

Before he could reply, however, he was pushed aside by Andre, who came hurrying up out of breath, and laid his hand on the father's shoulder.

"Maitre Picard," he said in a strong, hopeful voice, "don't despair; there is still a chance of saving the poor little lad. I am going to try it. I have been looking for a ladder; the men are bringing it now."

The words were greeted by a ringing cheer from the bystanders, and half a dozen of them hastened off to assist in bringing the ladder. With a strange look, in which wonder, hope, and gratitude struggled with a sort of shame, the miller lifted his eyes to the young man's face, but he said not a word.

Moreau eyed his rival with a scowl.

"You will not attempt it if you set any value on your life," he remarked.

"Well, perhaps I do not," was the quiet reply.

"Oh, if you are bent on committing suicide, I have no more to say; but, if you expect to find anything living in that furnace, you are a greater madman than I take you for! Why, it" —

Maitre Picard suddenly sprang to his feet, all his energy returning in a moment.

"Madman? He is a hero," he cried fiercely. "and thou art a heartless craven! Stand back!" And, taking his quondam ally by the arm, he literally flung him on one side.

Moreau turned white with rage and offended dignity.

"You shall repent having insulted me, Pierre Picard," he said, and casting a venomous look at him, stalked away.

At the same moment two men came hurrying up, bearing a long ladder, which was at once placed against the front wall of the house. Twice Andre attempted to mount it, and was driven back, blinded and half suffocated by the smoke from the burning thatch. As he paused a moment to recover his breath before making a third attempt, suddenly there came from the room above a sound that went like a knife to the hearts of those who heard it, — a child's shrill, despairing scream. Again and again it was repeated, rising high above the noise of the fire.

"Father, father!" wailed little Pierre.

The unhappy father twisted his hands in his gray hair, and ran hither and thither like a distracted creature, uttering broken

cries of agony. The crowd, which was now swelled by groups from the village and neighboring farms, swayed to and fro in intense excitement. Men shuddered, — women moaned and sobbed.

Andre set his teeth hard, drew in his breath, and, taking advantage of a moment when the smoke was lifted by a passing breeze, rushed at the ladder, and this time gained the top, and got his foot in at the open casement. For an instant his figure stood out in dark relief against the red glare within, then the smoke and flames seemed to swallow it up, and he was lost to sight.

There was a long minute of breathless silence, broken only by the crackling of the burning wood. Every eye in the crowd was riveted on the window; all the upturned faces wore the same expression of strained suspense. Then there burst forth a thrilling, triumphant cheer as Andre reappeared at the window with what looked like a small white bundle in his arms.

He had his foot on the window-ledge, when a loud cracking noise above his head made him glance upwards. At the same moment there was a warning shout from below.

"Quick, — save yourself! The roof is falling in!"

There was no time to descend the ladder. Claspings his light burden closer in his arms, he leaped blindly forward to the ground, — not a second too soon, for, at the very moment when he alighted, the timbers of the roof fell with a great crash, bringing with them a mass of flaming thatch and scattering a shower of sparks over the yard.

Half a dozen hands lifted Andre to his feet, and dragged him back out of harm's way. Then the crowd closed upon him, — cheered him till they were hoarse, — shook hands with him, — patted him, — would have hugged him next, in their enthusiasm, if he had not struggled away from them.

"Here he is, safe and sound, Maitre Picard!" he said, as he made his way to the miller and placed the child in his eager and outstretched arms.

With a fierce emotion which was startling in a man naturally so self-contained, the father hugged his recovered treasure to his bosom.

"My heart, — my love, — my little dove!" he said in a passionate whisper, raining kisses on the little white face, the piteous

sobbing mouth, the frail hands that clung to his neck.

The child's terror subsided as he felt the pressure of the familiar arms; his sobbing ceased, and, with a little fond murmuring noise like the coo of a pigeon, he put up one hand to stroke the miller's face.

"Don't cry, father," he whispered; "Pierre is not hurt."

"No, he is not hurt, the brave little man," said Andre, smiling, "but, if I had been a moment later— The curtains of his cot were on fire; the smoke had stupefied him; and he did not wake till the flames actually touched him. See,—his hair is singed at this side!"

As he pointed, Denise uttered a stifled cry.

"Oh, look at your hand!" she exclaimed, in terror.

He looked at it mechanically, and then for the first time discovered that it was badly burnt. He was wounded too; the blood trickled from a deep cut on his forehead, made by some of the falling wood-work.

"It is nothing," he answered slightly; but even as he spoke he turned pale, staggered, and would have fallen, if the miller, hastily handing the child to Denise, had not extended his arm to support him.

"Lean on me, my son," he said.

"My son!" A wild, sweet hope leaped up in Andre's heart at the words. He glanced quickly at the other's face, but it had regained its usual inexpressive stolidity, and gave no clew to his thoughts.

"If you can get as far as the mill, Denise will dress your hand," he said.

The young man assented, and they moved slowly away, just as a distant shout and rumbling of wheels told that the fire-engines were approaching.

It was an hour later. The fire was at length subdued, and the stars looked coldly down upon the half-ruined homestead, with its roofless walls and smoke-blackened gable,—a melancholy sight for the summer sun to rise upon.

In the lower chamber of the old mill, on an extemporary couch of empty flour-bags, sat Andre, with Denise at his side. She had dressed and bandaged his hand, and was now bathing his wounded forehead. Near the doorway, very grim and upright in her black serge skirt, and tall, sugar-loaf

cap, sat Madame Leblond, looking out with an inscrutable expression of countenance straight before her across the green. Little Pierre was coiled up fast asleep on Madeleine's lap. A lantern on the floor lit the faces of the group, and cast their exaggerated shadows against the flour-whitened walls, giving an unreal, fantastic look to the scene.

"Is the pain there?" asked Denise softly of her patient, laying her hand, light as thistle-down, on his temples.

"It was there, but it is gone: you have charmed it away," he replied.

"In that case," remarked his mother, looking round, "perhaps you are able to ride home now? The sooner we start the better."

"Ride!" echoed the voice of the miller, who had ascended the steps unperceived, and now stood in the doorway, looking in upon the group. "He must not attempt it. I have sent his horse back to La Chenaie; when he feels well enough, Jean will drive him home."

"I wish you would let Denise and the little one come with us," said Andre eagerly. "They could stay at La Chenaie till you have the new roof on. My mother would make them heartily welcome." And he cast an appealing look at her, which she feigned not to see.

"Would she?" queried the miller dubiously, as he took up little Pierre, who had awakened at the sound of his voice, and sat down near Andre, wiping his heated forehead.

The widow looked round with a dry smile.

"You think I might pay you tit for tat, miller, and shut the door on your daughter as you did on my son?" she said. "Well, so I might, if I were inclined to be revengeful; but"—

"But you can afford to be generous," he interrupted gravely. "Your son has had his revenge already, madame." He turned to the young farmer. "Listen, Leblond. People call me a hard man; but I am not an ungrateful one. I think. It has never been said of Pierre Picard that he forgot a benefit or forsook a friend; and from this night you are more than my friend. The debt I owe to you can never be paid—never—never!" he repeated, with emphasis; and, as he spoke, his arms unconsciously tightened their clasp of the child on his

knee, who looked up, wondering, into his agitated face.

Andre flushed; his eyes sparkled with light; and, leaning forward, he said quickly, —

"You can pay the debt with interest whenever you choose. Give me Denise, and you shall have a receipt in full."

"Hum,—that is business-like," remarked Maitre Picard, his keen black eyes twinkling.

"Gently!" cried Madame Leblond, coming forward. "Is not Denise already disposed of? Simon Moreau" —

The miller, who was refreshing himself with a pinch of snuff, gave a sudden snort, which made them all start.

"Simon Moreau may go — elsewhere for a wife," he said grinning, as they looked at him. "He shall have no daughter of mine. I told him so half an hour ago. He" —

"What! Then Denise is free?" cried Andre, starting to his feet. "O Maitre Picard, you won't refuse her to me a third time?"

Denise crept to her father's side, and, winding an arm round his neck, whispered, —

"He has given you back one child, *mon père*: let him have the other!"

"Go thy ways then, silly child," he growled, pushing her gently away, "and pay my debt by making him happy, — if thou canst."

"I will try," she said simply, turning to her lover with a smile as bright as a May morning.

"Thou hast done it already!" he whispered, as he folded his arms about her, and pressed upon her lips the sweet kiss of betrothal.

"While those two are making love, suppose we make friends, Madame Leblond?" said the miller, extending his hand, which was cordially shaken by the widow.

"And now," she said briskly, "we had better start at once if we are to reach La Chenaie tonight."

"Tonight, mother? Why, it is morning!" exclaimed Andre, pointing through the doorway.

They all passed out, and stood for a moment at the top of the steps, looking toward the east, where the "red rose of dawn" was unfolding. Even as they watched, the tender, dim, uncertain light grew warmer; a streak of lovely, luminous primrose broke through the gray clouds on the horizon; the mists rolled like a gently withdrawn veil from woods and fields, and the violet eyes of the summer day unclosed bright and pure, as if there were no death in the world, nor sin, nor sorrow.

"Yes, it is morning," said Andre softly, taking Denise's hand, — "the morning of a fresh day and the dawn of a new life, sweetheart, for thee and me! Come, let us go home!"

## ONE OLD MAID.

BY ADA L. FLETCHER.

## CHAPTER I.

"I NEVER could see why your sister remained, and does remain, unmarried, Mrs. Western," said Colonel Ingersoll, looking over the heads of the swaying crowd before him to where Edna Morse was standing. "She was certainly one of the loveliest girls of my acquaintance ten years ago—begging your pardon, by far the prettiest of the Morse girls—and she is still the handsomest woman I know. Then there was always a very peculiar sort of fascination about her, which every one felt that came near her. There is something mysterious about it."

"Edna was always of a very reticent nature," said Mrs. Western, "and has certainly admitted no one into her confidence on this subject. I cannot think, either, that she has ever been what is called disappointed in love, for she has never had in the least the appearance of a 'blighted being,' but has always been just what you see her to-night, the very life of every crowd she is in. I can't think there has been any love story in her life, because, being several years her junior, I have grown up with her, and would certainly have known something of it if there had been."

"I suppose, then," said the colonel, "she has always been waiting for some impossible ideal of hers to happen along. There are such cases; but I tell you, Mrs. Ida, changing the subject a little, and speaking as an old friend of the family, Edna's life will be far happier than Allie's, if you allow her to marry Bruce Egerton."

The lady's sunny face clouded for an instant. "But how are we to help it, colonel? You know that child as well as we do. Look at her now, standing over there by the piano. She looks like a little angel, all softness and smiles; but there is a will firm as iron beneath her gentle appearance. She has been told all that we know about Bruce, but she has got it into her foolish head that she can reform him, redeem him, and all that nonsense, and she can't be moved. If our father and mother were only living. I would not feel so wretchedly about it; but it seems now as if the responsibility rested upon us."

"What does Edna say about it?"

"O, she feels as deeply as I do, but she has never said anything to her about it yet. She said she would leave it to Howard and me."

"Well, I think she ought to talk to her. I believe she'd have more influence than any of you, because Allie is more like her. I mean to tell her so." And away went the colonel through the crowd of muslins and silks, with the air of a man who has made up his mind.

This was not a large party or ball—only a "little sociable," they called it, but nevertheless there was dancing; and just as the colonel reached the piano, Allie whirled past him in Bruce's arms to the quick time of a waltz.

"How do you like to see that, Miss Edna?" he asked, as he reached her side.

"I don't like it at all," she said, more energetically than usual with her; "and it must be stopped," lifting to the colonel's face a pair of eyes that had made many hearts beat faster in their day—eyes clear bluish-gray, like the depths of a Switzerland lake.

"And you must stop it," said Colonel Ingersoll, decidedly.

"I?" the eyes dilating with wonder. "What can I do?"

"Everything," was the prompt answer. "I believe you and I both knew Lynn Egerton, Bruce's brother, did we not?"

For one instant the colonel must have felt as every kind-hearted surgeon must when he probes a wound, even when it is for the patient's good. The white lids closed swiftly over the wonderful eyes, the rose faded out of cheek and lip, leaving an ashy pallor, while the blue veins on the white forehead were swollen almost to bursting. The white hand laden with rings that had been toying with the chain that held her watch closed over it, until the slender gold thread lay in pieces on the floor. In an instant it was over, though, and she lifted her eyes again to the colonel.

"What can I do?" she whispered, with lips that were still pale and trembling.

"I think," he said, gently, "if you were

to tell her Lynn Egerton's story as you and I only know it, she would listen to you. I think it is a duty you owe your motherless sister."

"I will do it," she said. "I had thought of it before."

Then she moved away from him with the queenly grace that distinguished her from every other woman in the room, whispering to Mrs. Western as she passed her:

"Send Allie to me to-morrow evening. I want to see her." Then on her brother's arm she left the house.

## CHAPTER II.

VERY softly and slowly the white slender fingers touched the ivory keys, and the strain of music that floated out of the open windows was sadder than Edna knew, for her thoughts were not there, though her fingers strayed over the keys. So absorbed was she that she heard no footfall on the marble steps outside, nor on the velvet carpet behind her, and was only aroused at last by two little hands that playfully blinded her, and a pair of loving lips that sought her cheek.

"Any one so disposed could come in and run off with you, sis," said Allie's clear young voice, "and no one would be any the wiser. It is not like you to sit in the shadows. Why don't you ring for lights?" She moved toward the bell rope.

"Don't, Allie," said her sister, gently. "I like the twilight better this evening. Did Ida give you my message?"

"She just told me you wanted to see me this evening, and I have got so used to receiving that message from all of you, that I knew exactly what it meant. I did think you were going to let me alone on that subject, Edna!" And the red lips drooped ominously.

"No, little sister! I sent for you because I was lonely and sad, and wanted somebody to talk to, and there is no one on earth I love so well as you. I want to tell you a story."

"O!" with a long sigh of relief. "That sounds like I was a child again. Sit down at the window, sister, and let me sit at your feet as I used to."

When the brown head had found its old-time resting-place on her knee, Edna's voice was not very steady as she began:

"It is of a friend I once had, Allie, that I am going to tell you. A girl so much like you are now in disposition and moods, and even in appearance, that it makes me sad to look at you sometimes, darling, though I love you so dearly. She was just eighteen at the time I speak of, and people called her very pretty; with little peculiar ways of her own, so unlike everybody else's that they were attractive to most people. Any way, she had hosts of friends during her first winter out, and a great many admirers. She laughed and danced the short bright hours away, laughing in her willful way at the very thought of love. But at last the wayward heart fell captive, and to one utterly unworthy of the heart he had won. But in vain friends remonstrated and parents threatened. The girl prided herself on her strength of will, and her infatuation was so deep that she refused utterly to believe anything against him. Even when it was proven to her own eyes that he drank, and drank deeply, she clung to him with a frenzied faith in her own power to reclaim him. He not only drank, Allie, but there were other vices to which he was addicted, the very thought of which will make a modest woman's cheek burn with blushes. Friends came to this girl and told her it was the wild bad blood the young man had inherited that caused the evil in his nature, and that it could not be eradicated; told her how his father had fallen in a duel with another drunken wretch, about a woman of questionable character. But she would not listen to any of this. If he could not help his habits, she said, neither could she help loving him. Again and again he promised reformation, and again and again was the promise broken, but her trust never failed. At last her infatuation reached its height, and an elopement was planned. Then came the terrible awakening. Everything was ready that could be done by the girl herself, and her still unsuspecting parents had bidden her good-night. For long hours she waited at the place assigned them for meeting, but, Alice! he did not come! Imagine the anguish that filled that girl's heart as she dragged herself back to her room! Her only comfort was that no one knew it, not even her own parents; and though her heart should break, her secret should be buried there. The next morning the papers were ringing with the story, Alice, the very night he had planned to



elope with this girl whose worst fault was her blind faith and love for him, he had started to run away with a married woman, and been shot dead by the maddened husband. Alice! Alice! child, do you wonder that I am trembling from head to foot as I tell you all this, but there are no tears in my eyes? Alice, you are the first being to whom this sad story has ever been told, the only one who will ever know it, for, dear, that miserable girl was your sister, and the far more miserable man Lynn Egerton, only brother of Bruce, in whose veins that wild bad blood still flows, as he betrays by his everyday actions. O Allie! little sister! be warned by your sister's life. Like the Spartan boy, I have hid the wolf in my bosom, and laughed and smiled with the rest of you, my only comfort, as I said, that no one knew. But only God knows how I have suffered through all these years, and how I must suffer on until the grave closes over me. I would have gone to my grave with the story untold, Allie, and let the world gone on thinking me stony-hearted

and unloving, if Colonel Ingersoll, the only one who has ever guessed at the truth, had not told me that he believed the only way to save my pet sister from a fate as bad if not worse than mine was to tell her the whole wretched story."

For a few moments there was no sound in the darkened room save the sighing of the wind in the pine trees outside. Allie's tears were falling like rain, but she did not speak for a while. Then she slipped from her finger the glittering ring that bound her to Bruce Egerton, and laid it in her sister's hand.

"Send it to him, Edna, and take me away from here. I am so weak!" And Edna knew that her story had not been told in vain.

All the world ever knew was that Edna Morse and Alice went to Europe, and were gone long enough for Bruce Egerton to follow in his father's footsteps, and that Alice married very happily afterward. But they are still wondering why Edna Morse never married.

## **OTHO OF GERMANY.**

**BY PROF. AL. GUERDEON.**

A heavy rain ushered in a black autumnal night which closed over the field of Bussentelle; concealing in almost impenetrable darkness the flight of the fugitive, and somewhat abating, by its gloomy influence, the ardor of the pursuer.

The uproar and tumult of the battle had subsided. The shouts of the onset, the neighing of steeds, and the shrill call of trumpets, had given place to the wild wallings of the elements. No sound met the ear but that of the wind and the rain rushing through the tangled mazes of a leafless forest, as two knights, armed *cap a pie*, forced their way through the thick woods bordering on the shores of the Mediterranean.

"The game is up," exclaimed the fore-

most rider, suddenly springing from his steed as the heavily caparisoned war-charger sank under him; "and my life and diadem are not worth an hour's purchase."

"Courage, royal Otho!" said his companion, likewise dismounting, and speaking in a hollow and suppressed voice, as though the action gave him great pain. "The hope that has carried you thus far from the hot pursuit of your enemies must yet bear you on."

"Now, by St. Peter! noble Count, your advice is physic to a dying man. My good steed has breathed his last, and these limbs will poorly aid me in eluding the scent of the bloodhounds who track my steps."

"Danger besets you on every side," returned the wounded knight impatiently;

"but delay is certain death. Mount my horse, and speed for life through the forest."

"I value existence too little to prolong mine on such dishonorable terms, brave Hermon. Never shall my enemies say that Otho of Germany fled like a coward, leaving his friend to the treacherous horde who have brought his life and honor into such jeopardy."

"My liege, this is no time to indulge in chivalric sentiments. The fate of the empire depends upon your life. Mine has already sped. Number me with the brave men you left to the crow and the vulture on yonder ill-starred field. Hark!" he continued, sinking from the tree, which had hitherto supported him, to the earth: "the foe is upon us. I hear the tramping of steeds, and the deep baying of the dogs, which rise on the blast like the knell of death."

The emperor started and listened, while the surviving steed snorted and pricked up his ears, and impatiently shook his slackened rein.

"You are right, Hermon: they are near. Arise and fly. Darkness will no longer conceal us. See! the moon bursts forth."

He paused, but received no answer. He touched the hand of the knight, which lay extended on the ground. The icy coldness chilled him. He loosened the clasp of his visor, and lifted the heavy steel casque from his head. Through a misty atmosphere, the moon shed a sickly light on the pale brow and blood-stained hair of the knight. Otho gazed for a moment on the lifeless form of his friend, sprang to the steed, and fled through the forest with desperate speed.

The night was far advanced. The wind, which had been rising for some hours, dispelled the haze which enveloped the moon; and she now shone in cloudless glory on the ocean.

No sail was visible, no indications of the haunts of men met the anxious gaze of Otho, as he slowly paced the beach, leading his tired horse, and bitterly ruminating on the past.

While he was meditating on the course to pursue, the sound of revelry met his ears: the laugh, the song, the wild huzza, arose on the wind, and mingled with the roaring of the billows which rolled at his feet.

Otho looked cautiously around as a bois-

terous peal of merriment awoke the lonely echoes of the place; but no object met his eye, save the broad expanse of waters, and the deep shadow of the bold rock beneath which he stood. He began to think something of a magical illusion prevailed. At length the following ditty was chanted in full chorus, by many voices, in his native tongue.

"Where the sun warms or the tempest lowers,  
The treasures of the ocean and the earth are  
ours:

Freedom and conquest attend our sail,  
And the prize shall be ours ere the moon  
turn pale.

"The wind that ruffles the breast of the deep,  
And howls round our cavern, shall lull us to  
sleep:

We sail by the glory of moonbeam and star,  
And shout to the billow that bears us afar.

"Bear a hand! bear a hand! unmoor the  
boat!

With the wind and the tide to our vessel  
float.

When the black flag is hoisted, rude warfare  
is nigh:

Where its dark shadow quivers, the boldest  
will fly.

"Then courage, my mates! the wind sings  
loud:

The moon has burst from her swarthy cloud.  
Again must we dash through the angry roar  
Of the foaming surge ere the night is o'er."

This wild burst freed the emperor from doubt as to the profession of the revelers; and he rightly concluded that he was near the rendezvous of one of the notorious hordes of pirates which in the dark ages infested every island and shore of the Mediterranean.

Finding he was likely to escape Scylla, only to fall into Charybdis, he was about to bend his course in a different direction, when his horse, finding himself near the haunts of men, neighed long and loudly. The sound had scarcely gone forth, before all was silent in the cavern; and Otho had time only to disengage his plumed helmet, and commit it to the deep, ere a huge stone was rolled from the mouth of the cave, artfully concealed by an angle of the rock. A flood of light instantly burst forth, revealing a group of men variously attired, feasting around a table hewn from the solid

rock, which blazed with goblets of precious metal filled with sparkling juice of the grape. In another moment the emperor was surrounded by armed men, whose fierce and menacing gestures indicated that little mercy or forbearance was to be expected at their hands.

Otho, accustomed to command a turbulent and warlike people, bent not from his native dignity in addressing the lawless band before him. Courage could not rescue him from his perilous situation; but a bold and resolute carriage with such men was more likely to succeed than cowardly supplications or mean submission. Turning, therefore, to the foremost in the group, whom, by his proud bearing and fierce demeanor, he concluded to be their leader, he said, —

“Chance and my evil destiny have thrown me into your power. My rank is noble: aid me in my present need, and I will so amply reward your services that henceforth you may abandon this lawless life.”

“Methinks the fortunes of an unhelmed knight would pay us poorly for exercising the rites of hospitality,” returned the pirate tauntingly. “What sum could you offer of sufficient magnitude to tempt the rover to forsake his traffic on the deep? The wealth of nations is ours. We have bought our freedom on the waves with our blood, and derive our treasures from the remotest regions of the earth.”

“Peace, Theodoric!” exclaimed a voice from behind, which made Otho start, as a tall, martial figure emerged from the cavern. “Is it thus,” he continued, addressing his comrade, “that you prove your boasted freedom, by playing the tyrant with a stranger whose misfortune is to have fallen into your hands? Now, by St. Nicholas, the patron of the mariner, I find man is the same arbitrary thing on the throne, in the camp, or on the deep. Give him power, and he abuses the prerogative with which he is invested.”

During this speech, Otho examined, with an air of troubled interest, the dark but intelligent countenance of the outlaw. His figure was lofty, well and strongly made. Though plainly attired in the coarse garb of a seaman, he possessed a firmness of step, a grandeur of deportment, indicating high lineage and early acquaintance with arms. His complexion had suffered from the hot climate and exposure to weather;

but the fire of genius pervaded his features, and flashed through the dark and piercing eye, which spoke of deeds boldly resolved and fearlessly executed. His brow was marked with an expression of deep and settled melancholy, whose gloomy power had stolen the glow of health from his cheek, and shed its blight on the rich masses of raven hair, which, in the full meridian of manhood, were already mingled with silver. His countenance, once seen, could not well be forgotten; and the remembrance of its lineaments recurred to the mind of the emperor like a troubled dream, recalling the calm sports of boyhood, the rash, impetuous career of youth, the fierce tyranny that had marked his entrance on manhood.

“It is only fancy, or he, too, would recognize me,” thought he, as the pirate turned to him, and said in a courteous tone, —

“Sir Knight, you are welcome to our rugged cheer. Follow me.”

The cavern was strongly illuminated with torches which gleamed on arms and trophies won from remote and barbarous nations. The captain motioned Otho to a seat at the lower end of the board, and, having seen him well supplied with refreshments, turned to a beautiful youth who was seated at his right hand, his head resting on a small lute. With that youth he entered into earnest conversation, from time to time casting significant glances at Otho.

Once the emperor encountered the full, languishing blue eye of the stripling, whose color mounted even to the snowy temples, which showed their marble whiteness from among the golden locks by which they were shaded.

The youth turned away his head to conceal his confusion; and, as his hand unconsciously fell over the instrument, it emitted a tremulous strain of melody. Then the minstrel, as if gaining courage from the sound, sang a simple ditty, which served more forcibly to enchain the attention of the emperor. As if under the influence of magic, he gazed with an intense interest on the dark-browed chief, and on the fair-haired youth by his side.

“My native land! my native land!

How many tender ties,  
Connected with my native strand,  
Call forth my heavy sighs!

“The rugged rocks, the mountain stream,  
The hoary pine-tree’s shade,

Where often, in the noontide beam,  
A happy child I strayed.

"I think of thee when early light  
Is streaming on the hill:  
I think of thee at dead of night,  
When all is dark and still.

"I think of those whom I shall see  
On this fair earth no more,  
And wish in vain for wings to flee  
Back to my much-loved shore."

The pirate cast a look of tender and melancholy regard on the minstrel, and Otho was on the point of expressing his pleasure, when the outlaw to whom he had first spoken suddenly asked him, in an imperious tone, —

"Sir Knight, whence came you?"

A dark frown rested on the brow of Otho as he replied, in a tone equally haughty, —

"From the field of Busentelle."

"How went the battle?"

"It was not the sword of the mighty, nor the force of the strong, that won the battle," returned the emperor. "Treachery prevailed."

"How!" exclaimed the captain, "did his Italian friends forsake Otho in his time of need? This," starting to his feet, "repays the tyrant for casting from him true hearts and brave hands."

"You are a German," said the emperor, fixing his eagle eye on the pirate. "What can you know of the emperor's private councils?"

A fierce light blazed in the eyes of the robber as he replied, —

"What do I know of them, you have asked. Hear me, Sir Knight, and then judge between that accursed tyrant and me."

He paused, covered his face with his hands, and seemed some time struggling with bitter reflections. Then he continued in a calmer tone, —

"Stranger, you see before you one of the noblest descended princes of the German empire, — the unfortunate Philip of Cologne."

The emperor started. A deathly paleness stole over his countenance, his lip quivered, and his eye involuntarily sought the ground, as the pirate proceeded in his narrative.

"I served my first apprenticeship in battle under the banner of Otho, and we reaped

together immortal glory on many a field. In the war with Sarmatia, the squadrons under my command one night surprised the camp of the enemy. We took much spoil and many prisoners. Among the captives was a young and lovely female, the only daughter of a man of rank, who, dying of his wounds, committed her, with a father's blessing, to his victorious foe.

"Had I followed the first generous impulses of my breast, I should have restored the weeping maiden to her friends and her country; but my heart soon owned for the unprotected female a tender passion. Our affections were mutual, and she promised to become my bride when the days appointed for the mourning for her father had expired.

"In the interval, returning to Vienna, I was received with the most flattering demonstrations of regard by the treacherous Otho. But woe to him who puts any trust in the faith of princes! He accidentally saw, and became deeply enamored of, my beautiful Sarmatian. His passion knew no bounds, and cruelty suggested the most speedy means of satisfying it.

"Finding me determined never to surrender my promised bride, he accused me of treason, and suborned witnesses. I was tried by the circle of princes. They dreaded the indignation of the emperor, and I was found guilty, and sentenced to a heavy fine and perpetual banishment. Rage, despair, and love were struggling in my breast. I gave myself up to the fury that possessed me; and, in the bitterness of the moment, I pronounced dreadful imprecations on the head of the man who was the author of my sufferings.

"But the measure of his crimes was not yet full. Eudocia resisted his passion, and treated the bribes he offered with the contempt they merited. Accusing her of sorcery, the enraged and vindictive emperor sent her, under strong guard, a prisoner to a distant castle. Permitted to bid adieu to my aged parents before I forever quitted my native land, I had not been many hours beneath the roof of my paternal castle before a friend communicated to me the tidings of Eudocia's sentence and approaching imprisonment.

"My first idea was to surprise the escort, and win back my promised bride at the point of the sword. This resolve I instantly carried into execution. I assembled my

friends and vassals, pointed out my injuries, and urged them, as men, as comrades-in-arms, to assist me in rescuing from destruction a lovely and an unfortunate lady. Aided by the darkness of the night, we succeeded in our enterprise, leaving but one man of the escort to return with the tale to the emperor.

"For that adventure the ban of the empire was pronounced against me: my name was crossed from the list of princes, and a high reward was offered for my head.

"Pursued from realm to realm, destitute of a place to abide in safety, my name became a by-word, a proverb in the mouth of my enemies.

"The sea was before me; and I had no other resource. I joined myself to a band of brave but desperate men, and became a pirate and a robber at the hands of the Emperor Otho."

The pirate ceased, and again passed his trembling hand over his brow.

"What think you," asked the emperor, in a low and hollow voice, "the wretch deserves who could heap such aggravated miseries on the head of a brave and an innocent man?"

"The fate," returned the pirate, "that he has doubtless met on the disastrous field,—disgrace, overthrow, and death."

"He lives to fulfill the latter part of your sentence," replied the emperor, rising, and approaching the outlaw. "Philip of Cologne, do you remember his face? Can you recognize, in a nameless fugitive, your ungenerous persecutor, Otho of Germany? Sheathe in his breast your sword, and sate your indignation on the author of your wrongs."

He threw his sword at the feet of the pirate, and stood with downcast eyes before the astonished assembly.

A hollow murmur passed from man to man, and "Down with the tyrant!" trembled on every lip, but no sound was audible.

The pirate sprang to his feet. A dark flush was on his face, his lip quivered, and a fierce warfare of passion shook his stalwart frame.

"Tyrant," he exclaimed, "the hour of retributive justice is at length mine. But for thee, I had been the pride and ornament of the land that gave me birth; and had reaped, in honorable warfare, immortal glory. Your unrelenting cruelty drove me to

the rocks and fastnesses of these islands, and made me the companion of outlawed men, a pirate on the deep. Die! and let my crimes, my lost honor, be visited on thee!"

His sword flashed over his head as he finished.

"Hold!" exclaimed the minstrel-boy, casting himself at the feet of the pirate; and staying the uplifted weapon. "Raise not your hand against the Lord's anointed. He is your prince; was once your friend. Will his condemnation insure your eternal welfare?"

The warrior paused.

"By you, Philip of Cologne, my voice was never before unheard," resumed the lovely woman, whose disguise could no longer conceal from the emperor the wife of the pirate. "Ever generous and noble, even to your enemies, prove to this unhappy prince how far virtue can triumph over the mean spirit of revenge."

"Angel!" exclaimed the emperor, "cease to plead. Your supplications are to my wounded spirit worse than the pangs of death. Can a just God forgive me for the illa I have wrought?"

He covered his face with his hands to conceal the agitation that was visible in every feature; but, in spite of his efforts to repel them, the bitter drops forced their way through his clenched fingers.

The pirate gazed on the conscience-stricken prince till the wrath of his countenance passed away, and tears trembled in his own fierce eyes.

"Live!" said he. "Restore these brave men to their rank and fortune, and this degraded arm shall re-instate you on the throne of your ancestors."

"No," returned the emperor mournfully: "I will not accept life at your hands. A self-condemned and guilty man, I will not attempt to excuse crimes committed in the lust of power, in the heat of youthful passion."

"Has futurity, then, no terrors?" asked Philip.

"None to him who has made his peace with Heaven," returned Otho; "who has offered at the throne of mercy the humble sacrifice of a broken and a truly contrite heart."

"Has your repentance been deep enough to rob the grave of its victory?" inquired Philip.

"Your noble brother, who lies a corpse in yonder wood, could best have solved to you that question. Oh that his mailed breast were my pillow! that the hand that defended him against a host of foes were cold and stiff like his!"

The outlaw turned away, deeply affected, while the emperor continued, —

"To atone in some measure for the wrongs I heaped upon your head, I passed an edict, recalling you to the honor of which my cruel tyranny had deprived you. I ordered diligent search to be made, in every realm, for the exiled prince of Cologne; but all my endeavors to discover the place of your retreat proved fruitless, and I bestowed on your lamented brother the favors I had in store for you. At your feet I ask forgive-

ness of the past, and demand the fulfillment of the just sentence your lips pronounced against me."

He would have thrown himself at the pirate's feet; but the chief received him in his arms, ere his knee could touch the earth. Deep silence for some minute pervaded the cavern, till the band, springing on their feet, and brandishing aloft their weapons, made the echoes ring with, —

"Long live Otho of Germany! Long live Philip of Cologne!"

The pirate, true to his promise, safely transported the emperor to the nearest German port; and the world soon forgot, in the commander-in-chief of her armies and the bulwark of her throne, the once dreaded lion of the Mediterranean.